ANGELO GUICCIARDINI;

Fizjer Ryfat 1927

OR THE

Bandit of the Alps.

[library stamp]

A ROMANCE.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

By SOPHIA FRANCES,

AUTHOR OF VIVONIO, CONSTANCE DE LINDENSDORF, AND THE NUN OF MISERICORDIA.

"——————There is a power
Unseen that rules the illimitable world,
....
While man, who madly deems himself the lord
Of all, is nought but weakness and dependence."
THOMSON.

"He seemed for dignity composed,
And high exploit: but———"
MILTON.

VOL. III.

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ANGELO GUICCIARDINI.

MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASWATI MAHAL TANJORE

3522

CHAP. I.

MOST earnestly did Orazio wish to avoid all further interview with the marchese till he should have recovered more the appearance of calmness; but as to do so now seemed wholly impossible, he endeavoured to suppress the violence of his emotions, and, with a silent obeisance, awaited the marchese's addressing him. Rovenza, however, looked so embarrassed and disturbed, and appeared to pause so cautiously ere he spoke, that the young man ventured to entreat that he would postpone the intended conversation till he should be more at his ease.

The marchese thanked him for his consideration, but said, that the urgency of the reason that rendered immediate communications necessary would not permit him to delay. He then continued :—

"It is my desire, my dear nephew, to come to some explanation respecting the disagreeable occurrence of this morning,

and to apologize in some degree for Ottavania's conduct, by accounting for the certainly indecorous manner in which she has behaved. I trust that the proof which I am about to give to you of my real desire 'o restore you your birth-rights with chearfulness will not be unacceptable." The marchese paused. Orazio's attention was fully engaged by this prelude. His look of earnest enquiry induced the marchese almost immediatcly to proceed; which, however, he did with even more apparent embarrassment than he had displayed at the commencement of his address. " Ottavania di Rovenza has been educated in a peculiar style," hesitatingly said the marchese. " I did not wish her to possess that insipid sameness--that want of an energetic character which distinguishes most of our young females, and which they dignify with the names of modesty, delicacy, timidity, and so on; but which *I* call hypocrisy, affectation, and finesse. My daughter has therefore been taught to think with freedom, to act with decision, and to speak with sincerity. It is true, there is no system perfect——and——and Ottavania's impassioned mind, uncurbed by the usual restraints, may sometimes lead her rather beyond the bounds of prudent precaution; but then there is one advantage results from this: we see her as she is, and are assured that she is at least free from the parade of artificial amiability. But to be brief: the loquacity of the person who at-

tends Cecilia as her servant has betrayed to many of my domestics the story of your visit at the cottage of the Signora di Berlotti. Your name, and some other circumstances, raised suspicions in the mind of my daughter that the Signor Locendro, and the mysterious young hunter—or bandit—or whatever ignorance and prejudice had thought proper to style you, were the same person. Some looks which passed between yourself and Cecilia, last night at supper, confirmed this suspicion almost into certainty; but Ottavania is too just, too candid to decide without conviction, and therefore she resolved to seek an opportunity of ascertaining the truth. This morning furnished her with one. I will not justify the means she adopted to gratify her curiosity, for certainly they are inexcusable: suffice it, that she was, as you may imagine, actively on the watch, and succeeded not only in overhearing every syllable which passed in your interview with Cecilia, but she had also been a concealed listener to the whole of the conversation that took place betwixt yourself and me this morning. By these means she discovered all that I have hitherto thought proper to conceal from her knowledge, and was thus enabled to ascertain that lamentable circumstance which, I fear, is indeed too true——that is—that from my——"

"Then it was from the surmise which you expressed to me this morning concerning the probability of Cecilia di Berlotti's

being the daughter of Angelo Guicciardini that the Signora di Rovenza believed herself authorised to vent on that lovely innocent such a torrent of cruel reproaches!" exclaimed Orazio.

The marchese looked much disconcerted and displeased, and repeated the words, "cruel reproaches!" in no very soft tone, but almost instantly added, in a milder voice—"If Ottavania di Rovenza's words partook of too much anger and vexation, they ought not at least to be criticised by one who cannot have so little comprehension as not to be sensible of the imperious motives which must have urged a young, lovely, and noble female to feel so impassioned and lively an interest in his concerns as even to make her unmindful of what she owes herself, and forgetful of the duties of hospitality to a dependent heretofore distinguished by her favour."

Confounded and astonished by the strange yet vague ideas to which the marchese's speech gave rise, Orazio felt the burning glow of manly shame o'erspread his cheek, while unconsciously he ejaculated—"Motive! what possible motive?"

"A motive, Orazio," said the marchese, while his observant eye was rivetted on the face of his nephew—"a motive which the noblest youth of Venice would have exulted in creating in the bosom of Ottavania di Rovenza. Oh! shame, young man, that you affect so little discrimination as not to feel that *love* alone could impel a noble

young female to words and actions which, in all the frantic rage of jealousy, declare a passion most sincere and ardent."

Transfixed to the spot by incredulity, amazement, and disgust, Orazio gazed on the marchese in speechless consternation, nor had power to start from his position till the latter had briefly made him an offer of his daughter's hand. The feelings of the astonished young man were then awakened even to agony. In one moment he felt all the difficulties of his situation. The generosity of such an offer, at a time when he was yet a prescribed being, and might be probably unsuccessful in all his meditated plans, and his unconquerable disgust and dislike towards Ottavania, inspired him with such contending and contradictory emotions, that he could only, in a few confused expressions, acknowledge his sensibility of the marchese's good intentions, and implore permission to withdraw and reflect. The marchese assented, and they parted.

Orazio flew into the dark-foliaged shades of the gardens. With troubled pace, he traversed the long alleys, and sought the retirement of the woods which on the south bounded the pleasure-grounds; but a considerable time elapsed ere he could attain sufficient calmness to think with perspicuity on the strange declaration made to him by the marchese. Ottavania passionately attached to himself—the proud, vain, malevolent Ottavania! It seemed beyond

credibility. The offer of her hand, however, seemed to place the matter out of doubt; and to decide whether or no this offer should be accepted was all that remained to be done. To insult a relative, so just and good as the Marchese di Rovenza had evinced himself, by refusing the alliance, would be the most painful and distressing circumstance, but to wed Ottavania would be certain misery to both. It was impossible to love her; and to be united to a jealous and malevolent being, who would probably render their home the seat of discord and woe, presented a prospect from which even his principles made him recoil in horror. Such were the first hurried ideas of Orazio; but as his agitation subsided, he perceived that the uncertainty of his situation afforded him a just and sufficient plea for declining the union, as he might certainly say with propriety that he could not think it honourable to enter into any serious engagements till he should be in a situation not to hazard the peace or fortunes of friends, whose affection for himself rendered them unmindful of their real interests.

Animated by the hope of being thus enabled to avert this dreadful stroke, Orazio suffered his thoughts to fix on the idea of Cecilia di Berlotti, that lovely and amiable girl, whose beauty appeared to his imagination scarcely less transcendant than her virtues.

Reared in the gloomy haunts of soli-

tude, yet the apt and intelligent pupil, who had uniformly improved on every lesson he received, the polish of Orazio's manners was not the courtly, free, or affected air of fashion, knowledge of the world, nor foppery. His demeanour, at once gallant and commanding, yet soft and complaisant, evinced his early attainment of every graceful and martial exercise, while the persuasive gentleness, propriety, and urbanity of his address proved that good sense and a good heart will need few instructions in all those little politenesses which are so essential in our intercourse with society.

In every account which this young man had hitherto given of himself, he had strictly adhered to truth. His embarrassment and seeming mystery in the cottage of the Signora di Berlotti had proceeded from his reluctance to confess that he still held any intercourse with the robber Angelo. Hence his inexplicable expression on the night on which he met Cecilia in the garden of the cottage. His principles of honour and rectitude imperiously inclined him to conclude all connection with a man so situated as was Angelo Guicciardini; but he had not the power of eluding one who appeared to make it a point to interest himself in his concerns, and have his every action watched. Besides, he was not wholly uninfluenced in his submitting to endure the continued interference of this man in his affairs, by the

impressive recollection of those services which had been rendered by Angelo Guicciardini to his revered protector and himself amid the lonely retreats of the Alps.

All that could possibly be done to avoid all further intercourse with the robber Angelo Orazio had already attempted. He had fled with haste and secrecy from the Alpine solitudes in which he had been reared, immediately on the death of the Count di Mirandini. Yet Angelo had succeeded in overtaking him; and by the information he gave of the success of the application made to the Count Ferbonino, had again laid Orazio under new obligations, and thrown him into such circumstances as would hardly permit him to make a positive rejection of Angelo's offered aid in the momentous plans for the restoration of the ruined honour of Udina's name. His introduction into the cottage of the Signora di Berlotti had really, as the marchese related to Cecilia, been a concerted scheme of Angelo's, who had indeed informed him of nothing more respecting that lady than that she had once been an intimate friend of the countess his mother; and this was afterwards confirmed to him by the Count Ferbonino, who, however, seemed disinclined to give him any very particular information, although he had carefully requested him to pay every possible deference to that lady. This occurred in the interview which took place between the count and himself at the priory of San

Ambrose; and it was at this time that the count thought proper to assure him that the temporary countenance of the signora would be of infinite service to him, and had been procured by his earnest intercession. Several cautions respecting the young Cecilia followed; and these were of such a nature as served to plunge Orazio into the utmost perplexity; for while he was instructed to respect her as if she were a beloved sister, it was never hinted to him that her situation was such as would not permit of any nearer connection, allowing that she possessed rank and fortune. But, in brief, there appeared to be a kind of mystery observed even by the Count Ferbonino respecting the signora and her daughter which was far beyond the penetration of Orazio, who found himself under the necessity of confiding in the exertions of his benevolent new friend, the count, for his introduction into the world, without presuming to investigate too deeply those reserves and mysteries which the former certainly affected on many points.

"You will remain at the cottage of the Signora di Berlotti till you receive a summons to meet me at Milan. You will beware of tampering idly with the affections of the lovely young creature to whose society you will have access; and you will most carefully guard your secret from the knowledge of the Father Ascollini,"
were cautions most emphatically uttered by the Count Ferbonino; and Orazio had

faithfully promised obedience, without once demanding why these warnings were so seriously given. To the danger of daily beholding and conversing with Cecilia di Berlotti, however, it was impossible such a young man could be exposed, without imbibing for one so truly amiable and beautiful the tenderest and most pure affection. She was the first young female to whose society he had been admitted on the terms of intimate friendship. He had seen several lovely cottage girls in his extended excursions while hunting on the Alps, and had once passed some days at a lonely village situated in one of the hollows of the Mount St. Gothard, where the niece of the cure of this little hamlet, a very charming young woman, had really interested his feelings; but in Cecilia he beheld a being so every way superior to the pretty Annette, that the latter was soon remembered without the least emotion. In the society of the signora and her daughter, days had appeared but hours, hours minutes, till the expected summons to meet the Count Ferbonino at Milan ended this dream of happiness, and fully revealed to Orazio the state of his heart. Not even the mysterious manner in which he received the mandate of the count could so far engage his thoughts as to make him insensible to the agony which the idea of separating from Cecilia di Berlotti occasioned him to feel; and yet this summons had been received in a most singular way, for the prior and his monks had

scarcely been gone a few minutes to celebrate the midnight service in the chapel, when Angelo Guicciardini entered the cell occupied by Orazio, and silently delivering to the astonished youth a billet from the Count Ferbonino, waited but till he had hurried over the contents ere he motioned him to rise and instantly accompany him.

Orazio obeyed, and in a few minutes was led by Angelo beyond the walls of the priory.

"How did you enter?" was the question impatiently asked by the young man to Guicciardini, as they hastily proceeded onward.

"By bribery," answered the latter; "these monks love money as much as they fear being plundered. But no more of this. You must be in Milan as speedily as you can be conveyed thither."

Orazio involuntarily breathed a heartfelt regret at the impracticability of bidding adieu to the benevolent Signora di Berlotti at such an hour.

"You must not delay even for a moment. Your friend will hereafter apologize to that lady for your abrupt departure; or I will make your apologies," earnestly said Angelo.

When this singular speech was uttered they were in sight of the cottage. The quick and agitated steps of Orazio were irresistibly impelled towards that sweet and peaceful residence where he had past so many happy hours. Regardless of the

entreatise of the robber he hurried towards the garden, and vaulting over the low fence which separated it from the chesnut grove, was pursued by Angelo, who missing him amid the darkened shades of the luxuriant shrubs that canopied the walks, first arrived at the spot to which Cecilia but a few minutes earlier had strayed. On perceiving her faint, he rejoiced in the approach of Orazio, to whom he resigned the care of the lovely insensible and fled, warning him, however, to follow him the moment she was recovered; but the young man, lost in the delight of thus unexpectedly beholding her whom his soul idolized, would have been little inclined to attend to his caution, had not the loud shrill whistle of Angelo reminded him that he must depart, and in the fear that the robber might again shock Cecilia with his presence, Orazio hastened away, with a heart torn by the most impassioned regrets of love. On rejoining Angelo he accompanied him to the edge of the wood adjoining the high road, and here he found a fleet horse provided for his journey, and the robber left him to pursue his route.

On arriving at Milan, almost the first question he asked the count, whom he found waiting for him at the principal inn, was wherefore Angelo Guicciardini had been employed as the bearer of the billet which the count had addressed to him.

"This man is useful in your affairs, and must be employed," was the laconic reply

of the count, who yet, on perceiving Orazio rather embarrassed, added—"In your case, my dear young friend, we must not be too nice; and Angelo Guicciardini may procure evidence which may prove the best support of your claims."

Orazio was compelled to appear satisfied; but the extraordinary emotion which the count could not wholly disguise as he spoke of Angelo, but too clearly evinced how much he suffered at the necessity which existed for accepting the services of Guicciardini.

A few hours after the arrival of Orazio, they set off for Vicenza, where the young man was introduced to his regiment, and the necessary arrangements for his appearing in the world with high respectability took place. His introduction to the Bishop of Verona followed, and from this excellent ecclesiastic he received letters to the Countess di Luzzana, for whose villa he set off from Vicenza on the same day that the Count Ferbonino so anxiously ommenced his journey in quest of Bionlello.

The stay of Orazio at Vicenza had been of several weeks continuance, and in that time he had neither seen nor heard any thing of Angelo Guicciardini, and was entirely ignorant of all that had occurred to the Signora di Berlotti and her daughter. He had, however, received a very full account of the Rovenza family, his relationship to which he had known from

the time of his discovering the secret of his real rank. But neither the friends of Orazio nor himself could deem any application to the Marchese di Rovenza either prudent or delicate. Rovenza's character was certainly of the most exalted and respectable nature; but when it was considered that he was in possession of the splendid fortunes of the hapless house of Udina, it did not appear very probable that he would relinquish such estates without a struggle; unless, indeed, his mind was of the most superior and uncommon elevation—a chance not to be hazarded at such a particular period; and therefore it was decided that the marchese should not be informed that his nephew was still in being, till he should be in a situation which must deprive Rovenza of any hopes he might conceive of being able to make any effectual attempt to crush claims so inimical to the interests of his children.

On the second day of his arrival at the Villa di Luzzana, Orazio beheld Ottavania and Leonardo di Rovenza. These new relations were not viewed by him without emotion; but for Leonardo alone he conceived any sentiment of friendship. At the very first moment the singular effrontery and style of manner so far removed from feminine delicacy as was that of Ottavania, could not fail to inspire him with dislike. He therefore shunned her very assiduously, although by an irresistible

and perhaps intuitive presentiment that she would yet interfere with his prospects of happiness, his eyes continually turned towards her. Involuntarily did he contrast in idea the bright image of Cecilia with the masculine figure of Ottavania; and, unconscious that that lovely girl was so near him, sighed at the fancied distance which separated him from her whom he considered as the most excellent of her sex. With the encreasing indulgence of such reflections, it is not surprising that Cecilia's unexpected presence at the Villa di Luzzana, a few evenings following, should have agitated him so violently, or that the excess of his feelings on that occasion should have compelled him to quit the apartment with precipitation, on perceiving her recovering from the swoon into which she had fallen on discovering him.

He could not so far master his emotion as to acquire a sufficient degree of composure to meet her again that night; but he made such enquiries of a brother officer who had accompanied him to the villa as fully informed him in what situation Cecilia was placed in the family of Rovenza; though he could not learn to what circumstances her being dependent on the generosity of the marchesa was owing. It was allowed that her birth, according to the account circulated by the marchese, was noble, but that she was an orphan without any other provision than what she should receive from the family into

whose protection she was received. Lost in astonishment at this singular intelligence, Orazio at the same time learnt that the doge and senate of Venice had just published an order for the apprehension of Angelo Guicciardini, who had been for a short time back discovered to have been lurking, with supposed evil intentions, in Venice and Padua.

The contrariety of emotions and reflections produced in the mind of Orazio by these accounts deprived him of repose that night, and induced him early on the following morning to seek an interview with Cecilia, when he learnt from her the real state of the affair, and that Angelo was in danger of suffering punishment at the appeal of the marchese di Rovenza. Convinced that the robber had really no ill designs against herself and the signora, and could not with justice be accused as the author or abettor of the Signora di Berlotti's misfortunes, he instantly determined to fly to Venice, and seek from Angelo himself some explanation relative to the part he had acted in the concerns of the signora. To see Guicciardini, if he was really to be found in Venice, Orazio knew he should not find difficult, as he had been informed by him that, if on any occasion he should need his assistance, he would hear of him at the church of San Mosco, by producing a ring which he gave him, to the sight of the Father Paulo, belonging to the monks' convent near that church

Thus resolved to hasten to Venice on this occasion, Orazio felt that some caution must be given to Cecilia to induce her not to betray her former knowledge of himself, and therefore he so earnestly entreated her to observe a silence respecting that circumstance till the expiration of six days—the period when he expected he should be able to return.

In a state of mind the most perturbed imaginable, he set off for Venice, and immediately on his arrival hastened to the church of San Mosco. The Father Paulo was soon found, and made no hesitation in telling him that Angelo was indeed in Venice.

A meeting between Guicciardini and Orazio took place at midnight in the dreary vaults belonging to the church; but in this interview Angelo positively refused to acquaint Orazio with any particulars of the history of the Signora di Berlotti; yet he requested him to let Cecilia know that her mother would soon be released from the hands of the enemy who had conveyed her away. He then gave some cautions to Orazio respecting himself, laughed at the plans of the state for his own apprehension, and said that he should leave Venice in a few days. Thus unsatisfactorily they parted, and Orazio intended to return to the Villa di Luzzana on the following morning, when, as he was on the point of leaving Venice, he was met by a superior officer, who now delivered to his charge

some orders respecting his regiment. This circumstance unavoidably obliged him to hasten to Vicenza instead of returning to the villa di Luzzana. The arrangement of these military affairs kept him at Vicenza several days; and it was during this delay that he received the letters addressed to him by the Marchese and Marchesa di Rovenza, acknowledging their relationship to himself, and earnestly inviting him to accept their affection and friendship, and to make the Villa di Rovenza his home at such times as he should not be engaged with his regiment. The kindness, the apparent sincerity which these epistles breathed, deeply affected the heart of Orazio; and he instantly resolved to avail himself of the offered favor and protection of these noble and generous relatives; while, with all the delighted emotions of love, he anticipated the happiness of continually beholding and conversing with Cecilia di Berlotti.

As soon as the business which detained him at Vicenza was concluded he set off with the utmost expedition for the Villa di Rovenza, and arrived at the moment when he was enabled to render the marchese a service in the detention of the Signor Faenza.

The reception which Orazio met with, and the singular interviews which took place between himself, several of the Rovenza family, and Cecilia, have already been detailed, except the conversation

which the Marchesa di Rovenza thought proper to hold with him on the preceding night after the family had retired; but as this interview related only to the various enquiries which the marchesa wished to make respecting some of his own concerns and the Signora di Berlotti's, and to those little instructions which it was necessary he should receive for placing him on his guard against the peculiarities of the marchese's usual manner of thinking and acting, lest any inadvertence in his own conduct should lose him the favour and protection of so singular a character, it is not essential to enter here on any further account of it.

CHAP. II.

NEARLY two hours were passed by Orazio in wandering in the dark woods on the south of the villa, ere he had decided on the line of conduct he should henceforward pursue while remaining with the Rovenza family.

His resolution of refusing the hand of Ottavania on the just plea which his uncertain and hazardous circumstances afforded him, was scarcely formed when he found himself perplexed and distressed by the idea that the marchese would most probably require his acquiescence in this disagreeable union in the event of his recovering his birth-rights. In such a case as this evasion would be impossible, even had the

principles of Orazio permitted him, even for an instant, to form the idea of making any. A few minutes' reflection clearly evinced to him that he could have no alternative but that of absolutely declining the alliance—a step which must involve him in the most painful dilemma, as he could scarcely expect that the marchese, after such an affront, could possibly be inclined to aid him in the recovery of an immense property which he must himself part with, in order to enrich one who had rejected the hand of his only daughter. That the marchese should desire to retain in his family, by the union of Orazio and Ottavania, that wealth which he had so long enjoyed in undisturbed possession was not surprising; and as the young man reflected on this circumstance, he heaved a sigh of sincere regret that the Signora di Rovenza did not possess those feminine virtues which might have rendered an union with her as supportable as one formed without mutual affection could prove. The heart of Orazio throbbed with agony as his imagination contrasted the ideal images of Ottavania and Cecilia; Cecilia, whose angel face and form were ever irradiated by the illuming expression of an angelic mind—whose beauty spoke to the heart with irresistible attraction, while it inspired only such ideas as the purity of her own soul might cherish or approve. "Ah! how dissimilar from that almost masculine figure, that confident countenance which

expressed all the disgusting traits of passion, insolent pride, envy, and malevolence, even while the assumed smile of good-nature curved her usually haughty lips.

"Ah, Cecilia! beloved, admirable maid!" he mentally ejaculated, while the fervor of an enthusiastic first attachment crimsoned his cheek, and added brilliance to his expressive eyes—"never, never, can I profane that sacred vow, that holy ceremony which binds the union of *hearts* alone, while the remembrance of thy unequalled loveliness, thy superior virtues, holds an influence over my soul."

The ardour of sentiment and feeling entranced his senses, as, now alive only to the energetic tenderness which filled his mind, he swiftly passed along the grassy path which led among the windings of the wood on his return to the villa, till, at the opening of a broad vista, he suddenly encountered Ottavania di Rovenza, pensively leaning on the arm of a female attendant. Had the fascinating basilisk met his enhorrored view he could not have gazed upon it with more irresistible intenseness than he now did on the form of Ottavania. Her face was partially veiled; but her bending attitude, her seeming unconsciousness of his approach, and the audible sighs she uttered, spoke her mind apparently abstracted by distress. Her attendant appeared insensible to every thing but the grief of her mistress, and with respectful

softness, was apparently soothing the affliction of her lady.

Disconcerted, confused, and irresolute how to act, Orazio had neither courage to retreat nor to advance. To fly from the presence of Ottavania would have been a tacit avowal of those sentiments of dislike with which she had inspired him; and to approach her with those consolatory enquiries and soothing compliments which her afflicted appearance demanded, would be equally culpable and unmanly, as his attentions might incline her to imagine that he considered her with a degree of interest which in reality he did not feel, and would subject him to the imputation of a contemptible species of vain gallantry to which he was superior. Ottavania, however, soon spared him all further embarrassment on this point. Through the thin texture of her veil she had marked, unseen and unsuspected, the changing expressions of his features, and the involuntary caution with which he had, on perceiving her, sought to avoid her view, by retreating from the path, and concealing himself beneath the shade of the overhanging branches of the tall, luxuriant trees; and while secret rage and mortification rankled in her heart, she slowly raised the veil, and, as if unconscious that he was so near, displayed her countenance, pale and bathed in tears, and directed her large bold eyes, which even the affected softness of an as-

sumed appearance of grief could not render interesting, towards the spot where he stood. A half-uttered shriek of pretended surprise and confusion indicated to Orazio that she had discovered him, and wished his approach. He now advanced, but with such an air, so serious and embarrassed, that even the excessive vanity of the Signora di Rovenza could not disguise from her his but too evident reluctance to address her.

Falteringly he uttered an incoherent apology for having so inadvertently intruded on her meditations.

"Your presence cannot be considered by me as an intrusion, signor," replied Ottavania, in a tone of ill-affected modesty, "as I have ventured hither in the expectation of meeting you."

The confusion and secret disgust of Orazio was increased tenfold by this unexpected confession. With averted eyes, he coldly bowed his acknowledgments.

His manner convinced Ottavania that she had nothing to hope from the air of delicacy she had adopted. She therefore resumed her usual manner; and while an impassioned vexation was visible on her features, she directed her attendant to withdraw a few paces, and to remain in waiting till she should require her presence.

Orazio heard this order with surprise and perplexity. He now perceived that she intended to engage him in some conversation; and he feared lest he should be

compelled to wound her feelings by an avowal of his real sentiments.

The very first words of her address convinced him that vanity had not led him into an illusion respecting the nature of her designs.

"By my thus hastily seeking an interview with you, signor, you will undoubtedly do me the justice to suppose that I am not uninformed as to the subject of your recent conversation with my father," she daringly said; "and I am superior to the affectation of denying those sentiments which I have already revealed to *him*."

Orazio bowed extremely low, in order to conceal the expression of the involuntary contempt and astonishment which agitated his mind, and was but too visibly imprinted on his features.

Ottavania continued:—"The native candour of my disposition, the style of my education, will not permit me to disguise the feelings of my heart beneath the flimsy covering of deceitful and absurd reserves; nor is it consistent with the obedience I owe to the dictates of truth and justice to conceal from you my views and my intentions. When I first beheld you, signor, at the Villa di Luzzana, as the pretended Swiss officer, Locendro, I knew not that your birth was noble, nor that you might probably become a powerful claimant on the possessions so long held by the marchese my father; but in that moment I decided that, were it possible to attract your

attention and affections, I would forfeit rank, wealth, and consequence, to unite my fate with your's. After this confession from a being of my ingenuous principles and character, you cannot be astonished at what occurred this morning. You had become an object of the liveliest interest to my heart; and I could not be inactive in whatever I imagined concerned you. The result of my watchful scrutiny has been the discovery of who you really are. I now understand, that in consequence of the avowal of the sentiments I entertain in your favour, which followed the certainly imprudent scene in which I was this morning engaged, that my father has made you an offer of my hand, and that you are now here to reflect on the decision which it is necessary you should make on this point. I do not ask you whether you have already made this decision. That you should in so short a space of time decide with calmness or justice would be utterly impossible. You are not yet acquainted with me, signor. The peculiarities of my character are so singular, and my manners so dissimilar from those of my own age and sex, that you may, nay doubtless *have*, imbibed very powerful prejudices against me. Mine is no common mind: the candour and impetuosity of my feelings but too frequently urge me to the most precipitate actions; but reflection ever inclines me to remedy the errors of passion. You are free, then, signor, to follow the impulses of your own

heart. I can feel for the delicacy of your present situation, and can conceive how painful must be the awkward embarrassment in which you are now involved by the proposal of my father, who, to be candid, is certainly influenced in his wishes for our union by the very natural desire of not relinquishing what he has so long enjoyed, as much as by his cares for my felicity. If then you do not resolve to reject an alliance which must be of some importance to you, you will accept the time which I recommend you to take for consideration, and for the cultivation of your knowledge of my real character; and in a month declare to my father your unalterable determination."

Ottavania now paused; but the amazed and disgusted Orazio found himself incapable of replying.

"You seem confounded, signor," observed Ottavania, with a smile: "you will now, I trust, do me the justice to believe, that your hand without your affections could not be accepted by one who would disdain and reject with abhorrence such a gift."

Orazio, now recovered by this forcible appeal to his feelings, attempted to express the admiration and surprise which, he hesitatingly said, her very unexpected conduct had excited in his mind; but still he could not wholly divest himself of the embarrassment that so singular an address had heightened; and ere he had concluded

the complimentary acknowledgments which he wished to pay her, Ottavania interrupted him, and frankly assuring him that she was convinced he felt grateful for the intimation she had given him, summoned her attendant, and, with a smiling bend of the head, bade adieu to Orazio, and proceeded towards the villa; but the young man, almost immediately sensible of the rudeness of permitting her to return without his attendance, instantly followed, and was allowed to accompany her to the house.

CHAP. III.

MEANWHILE the hapless Cecilia had been conducted by the good Signora della Albina to her apartment, and left to the care of her faithful Lodelli, while the signora proceeded to seek an opportunity of informing the Marchesa di Rovenza of the melancholy state of her amiable young *protegée*.

The signora did not return for above two hours; and this sad interval was passed by Cecilia in all the agonizing torture which her nearly distracted mind suffered from reflections the most fearful and harrassing. That Angelo Guicciardini was indeed her father, she could not even for a moment doubt; and the idea that she had exposed him to all the horrors of justice almost maddened her. His visit to the cottage—

his remarkable expressions—his offer of protection—her meeting with him in the caverns which communicated with the cottage—and, above all, the strange reserve and secrecy which the signora her mother had ever maintained as to her former history: in fact, every mystery was now accounted for by the presumption that the robber Angelo was her parent; nor could she hesitate to suppose that the Count de Weilburgh was some incensed relative of her mother, who wished to avert the possibility of infamy attaching itself to his name, from the conduct of the signora in uniting her destiny with such a man as Guicciardini, by secluding both her mother and herself in some penitential convent; or perhaps, urged by pride, to destroy them.

As these dreadful thoughts succeeded each other, the miserable Cecilia paced the room, in all the perturbation and woe which her situation could not fail of producing in her mind; and if her thoughts involuntarily turned for a moment on Orazio, she mentally recoiled from the recollection, oppressed with the conviction that it was now indeed her duty to banish him from her memory.

Alternately moving about her apartment, and weeping in despair on her couch, did the innocent sufferer remain for above two hours, insensible to all the simple but heartfelt distress of Lodelli, who in vain had urged her to be comforted, when at

length she was effectually interrupted in the indulgence of her sorrows by an exclamation uttered by her attendant, who most earnestly entreated her to come to the window.

Cecilia, impelled by the eager entreaties of Lodelli, approached the window, and beheld, in the spacious walk of which it commanded a view, Ottavania and Orazio slowly advancing towards the portico, and engaged in conversation. Cecilia clasped her trembling hands upon her aching bosom, and, with a wild and piercing gaze rivetted on both as they approached, seemed scarcely to breathe, till the loud laugh of Ottavania, who appeared to be diverted by something which her companion had uttered, and a curious and ironical glance which she directed up at the windows of Cecilia's apartment, shocked the latter so much, that she sunk fainting into the arms of Lodelli.

When the afflicted girl re-opened her eyes, she perceived the marchesa, pale and agitated, seated beside the couch on which she reclined. The sound of this respected and beloved lady's voice—the tenderness and compassion of her look, affected Cecilia with the keenest emotions of gratitude, regret, and sorrow. She now wept violently; and the relief which she experienced from this flow of tears restored her to sufficient composure to listen to the amiable marchesa, who now most seriously entreated her not to yield implicit credit

to the probably mistaken idea of being related to Guicciardini, and at the same time assured her that measures would be immediately determined upon to ascertain the truth of so strange a surmise.

Cecilia was not convinced: her grief was scarcely mitigated, and she could be consoled only by repeated assurances that no further pains would be taken to apprehend Angelo, as it could not be doubted that he had quitted the Venetian territories.

Cecilia now earnestly implored the marchesa to place her in a convent till such time as some information should be received of her mother; and her good protectress, well convinced that the delicate mind of her young *protegée* would never permit her to enjoy the least tranquillity in the villa after the discovery of the morning, promised to obtain the marchese's consent to her retiring to some religious house until her circumstances should become less uncertain.

The prospect of being thus enabled to hide her grief and shame from the observant and insolent eye of prying curiosity or insulting malice, was most soothing to the agonized heart of Cecilia, who received also permission to remain in her own apartment as long as she should think proper to seclude herself from society. The delicate attention to her feelings which this permission evinced on the part of the marchesa was most gratefully acknowledged by the

sorrowing girl, who, once more left to solitude and her own reflections, experienced not that excessive anguish of heart which she had suffered previous to the visit of her revered friend. Insensibly her mind had been calmed by the arguments and promises of the marchesa; and as her thoughts again reverted to Orazio, she blushed at the weakness she had yielded to on having perceived him in conversation with Ottavania di Rovenza, and severely condemned herself on this occasion. From this disagreeable subject, however, she quickly turned away, and, with something like composure, endeavoured to consider every particular of her morning's interview with Orazio—an interview which had been already productive of so much sorrow and disappointment; and it now occurred to her remembrance that neither Orazio nor herself had mentioned the singular circumstance of his having requested a private interview with her at the Villa di Luzzana, previous to his visiting the Villa di Rovenza.

This omission might on her own part be excused by her anxious solicitude and impatience to obtain that information which she had hoped and supposed he had to communicate to her relative to her mother, and which had made her for the time forgetful of every thing that did not immediately concern her parent: but that Orazio should not revert to so strange an incident, and that in fact he should have had

so little to acquaint her with, now filled her mind with the most disturbed ideas.

But in her reflections on this event, as well as in all her former efforts to penetrate the mystery of the circumstances in which she was placed, her conjectures served only to entangle her in doubt and uncertainty. She did not, however, long continue to perplex herself with useless surmises: one dreadful and superior certainty pressed heavily on her heart, and in the harrowing idea that she was the daughter of the robber Angelo, she lost all consciousness of other evils.

CHAP. IV.

WHILE the afflicted Cecilia, by confining herself to her apartments, sought to shun the pain and mortification which her mixing with the family might subject her to under her unfortunate circumstances, the marchesa almost unceasingly importuned her lord for permission to place the lovely girl in a convent; justly representing that religious retirement was certainly best calculated to restore her to some portion of tranquillity, and to afford her the most proper asylum.

The marchese coincided in these just ideas; but he objected that if she was too suddenly removed from the villa, such an event might create a spirit of curiosity in

the minds of those who had seen her so carefully cherished in his family, and would thus subject him to enquiries which he should not know how to answer.

The marchesa considered this obstacle as a mere trifle; and at length a day was appointed for the removal of Cecilia to a convent situated near Verona. The abbess of this house was a particular friend of the marchesa's, and the hapless Cecilia might justly expect to receive from this superior every tender care and kind consolation.

Meanwhile the marchese, who by this arrangement seemed freed from all further concern respecting his lady's fair *protegée*, devoted his whole attention to the recovery of his son, and to forming little plans to forward the union of Orazio and Ottavania. Apparently well convinced that his nephew would succeed in rescuing the name of the count his father from the shameful ignominy with which it had been loaded; and to the recovery of his birthrights, Rovenza scrupled not to avow to the young man that his marriage with Ottavania would reconcile him to the relinquishing the large estates which the latter had certainly a right to claim.

Orazio listened in silence; but not without experiencing the most painful emotions, yet his mind was so distracted by the affection he cherished for the lovely suffering Cecilia, by his incapacity to serve her, and by his fearful belief that she was indeed

related to Angelo Guicciardini, that his inquietude on her account made him insensible to the peril and uncertainty of his own situation.

When informed of her intended departure from the villa, he so far lost all command of his feelings as to request the marchese's permission to see her prior to her removal.

"Assuredly!" said the marchese, "you will see the Signora Cecilia in the saloon on the morning of her journey. She will be then present to make her acknowledgments and adieus to my family."

Orazio turned away in an agony of secret disappointment; for it was not to behold Cecilia amid the formality of a public adieu, that he had so anxiously implored permission. He did not, however, repeat his request, and the marchese began immediately to speak of the expected return of the Count Ferbonino, for whose arrival he professed himself most impatient.

But in vain did the marchese endeavour to divert the agitated thoughts of Orazio from Cecilia. In three days she was to depart: he might never more behold her: and could he endure the torturing idea that she would go impressed with the mistaken conviction that, as the daughter of the robber Angelo, he no longer sought to prove to her that he still entertained for her all those sentiments of respect and admiration with which she had inspired him as Cecilia di Berlotti.

But although Orazio most ardently desired an opportunity of evincing to the lovely girl how much he valued her felicity, and how truly desirous he was of promoting her happiness by every possible effort to find the means of controverting that cruel idea which had plunged her into such depths of increased misery; he yet did not harbour the least design of disturbing her peace by a declaration of the indelible passion which her beauty and virtues had kindled in his heart. Sadly conscious that, even were her affections his (a hope which the timidity and respect inseparable from genuine, virtuous tenderness had ever forbidden him to indulge), the most insurmountable obstacles would oppose their union. Orazio possessed too much of that generous feeling which shrinks from ensnaring a guileless heart into an attachment that can never be rewarded, and while in all the distraction and grief which the keenest sensibilities of hopeless love inflicts, he lamented the existence of those adverse circumstances which doomed him to silent despondence, and deprived him of every prospect of felicity; he still adhered to his resolution of not adding to the distress of his adored Cecilia by betraying to her the impression she had made upon his soul.

To see her, however, and to converse with her prior to her departure, he was fully determined upon, if this could be accomplished; but Ottavania and her unamiable companions, the Signoras Bellin-

zetto, who were still on sufferance at the villa, took such effectual care to prevent his being too frequently out of their view, that Orazio, in utter despair, saw at length the evening, preceding the morning on which Cecilia was to commence her journey, passing away, and still found himself incapable of obtaining the wished for interview. Had he not, however, been so strictly watched he would not have found much difficulty in the accomplishment of his wishes, for although Cecilia now never appeared in the family party, yet she frequently passed hours in the marchese's dressing room; and as she was obliged to traverse several long passages, and the grand picture gallery in her way to and from the apartments of the marchesa, he would have availed himself of his knowledge of this circumstance to have met her at such times, had not his every attempt of the kind been frustrated hitherto by the Signora di Rovenza, or her prying, indefatigable female friends.

But while Orazio was thus miserable in the anticipation of the heartfelt sufferings which he must endure after the departure of Cecilia, he was not, however, negligent of those claims which the friendship and good intentions of the marchese had established on his gratitude, and would have devoted almost his whole time to chear the lonely hours of Leonardo's confinement, could he have obtained the marchese's permission to visit, as frequent-

ly as his inclination prompted him, the apartment of his son; but a short visit of introduction had been the only one he had been suffered to pay the invalid, in whom, however, he had discovered traits of spirit and generosity, which rendered him most desirous of cultivating his friendship. The marchese, however, appeared to think that Orazio might be sufficiently occupied by his attendance on Ottavania. But independent of the humane motive which impelled Orazio to desire to pass some time occasionally with Leonardo, he likewise felt no trifling anxiety to learn wherefore the Signor Faenza had been suffered to escape with impunity, after the daring outrage he had committed. Orazio had, on first being informed of this singular circumstance, expressed the utmost surprise on the occasion; but could not discover what had influenced Leonardo to request the liberation of the man who had so maliciously aimed at his life. That Cecilia was in some degree implicated in the affair of the Signor Faenza's desperate conduct Orazio had received an oblique hint from Ottavania, but this intimation was so unsatisfactory, that he could form from it no very just opinion on the subject; and it served only to increase his anxiety to obtain an interview with Cecilia prior to her setting off for Verona.

While Orazio, a prey to a thousand torturing uneasinesses, was in vain devising methods to see her alone, Cecilia was en-

deavouring to attain resignation and fortitude to endure her lot with that meekness and submission which she knew was due to the will of the awful and beneficent ruler of events, and to impress upon her heart the pious remembrance that, however inscrutable to human comprehension are the ways of providence, those seeming evils which the All-Wise permits to occur in life's short existence, are trials, that if received and borne with religious resignation, shall ultimately terminate in the brightest joys of immortality.

From the moment Cecilia had obtained the marchesa's assurance that she should be permitted to retire for a time into a convent, she had endeavoured to fortify and compose her mind by every pious mental argument which religion could inspire, and at length found the deep anguish of soul which the idea of her being the daughter of Angelo Guicciardini had, in the first effervescence of her feelings, caused her to suffer, subside into that degree of chastened affliction which mingles meekness and patience with grief.

To the monastic retreat, into which she expected so soon to enter, she looked forward with hope: the tranquil seclusion of the cloister promised to heal those wounds with which her recent misfortunes had pierced her heart. Fully resolved to take the veil, should she really prove to be the child of the robber Angelo, this lovely girl now hourly sought to prepare her mind for that

life of devotional purity, by abstracting all her thoughts from the but too frequent recurrence to those sublunary events which had made but too pleasing an impression on her mind.—The recollection of all the happy hours of childhood—of those days of transient felicity which she had passed in the society of Orazio, when, sanctioned by a mother's approbation and command, she had considered him as deserving and amiable: in brief, every tender, every affecting and beloved remembrance she seduously attempted to banish from her mind, and considering herself only as the child of misfortune, doomed to obscurity and humility, bowed her heart submissively to her fate, and at length felt the balmy consolation which unfeigned piety diffuses over the soul that confesses the superintending cares of an overruling providence in the direction of events. But although Cecilia experienced so considerable a share of that holy resignation which is imparted by religion alone, she could not so entirely subdue the feelings of nature as to quell every emotion of her heart as they arose, and therefore she still suffered intervals of the keenest sorrow, when memory gave to her imagination the recollection of past regretted scenes, or her fears anticipated new afflictions. Of the probable situation of the signora her mother she could no longer think as she had formerly done; the idea of her beloved parent was now associated with that of Angelo Guicciardini,

and the trembling heart of Cecilia durst not dwell intently on a subject now but too well calculated to plunge her into despair. To avoid the indulgence of painful reflections, and to await with patient resignation the future elucidation of the mysteries of her fate, was an obvious duty which she felt sensible she should endeavour to fulfil; and her pious efforts to do so were rewarded by the approving and sustaining voice of a pure and guileless conscience.

The Marchesa di Rovenza, who perceived this frame of mind in her lovely young *protegée* with sentiments of mingled concern and admiration, strengthened her pious resolves by daily consolation and advice, but wisely forbore all discussion on the subject of her sorrow; nor did she think proper to suggest any hopes that her circumstances might prove less degrading than she now supposed them to be, lest a painful termination of suspense might add a thousand new pangs to her afflictions. Of Orazio also the amiable marchesa seldom spoke to Cecilia; and as the marchese's plans, relative to the union of Ottavania and his new-found nephew were yet a secret in the villa, his lady did not deem it essential to inform her *protegée* of that circumstance; and the amiable girl herself had too just a sense of delicacy and propriety to make many enquiries respecting one, whose idea she was sedulously exerting herself to banish from her heart.

As the moment of her departure from the

Villa di Rovenza drew nearer, Cecilia, however, became every moment more affected at the thought of leaving her beloved protectress; and although repeatedly assured that she would receive the most kind attention from the abbess of the convent to which she was preparing to retire, the sorrowing girl experienced so heavy a depression of spirits, that she could scarcely forbear imagining that the despondency of her feelings foreboded new misfortunes. She did not, however, distress the marchesa by any mention of the sadness to which she involuntarily yielded; yet on the night preceding the day fixed for her departure, the gloom of her mind was so much increased that it could no longer be either concealed or disguised. Pale, trembling, and incapable of shedding a single tear, she received the private adieus of the marchesa in a manner so unlike that which usually distinguished her, that her amiable protectress, checking her own tears, enquired, with the most lively anxiety, the reason why that look of mingled apprehension and horror was depicted on her expressive features. The vague reply, the faint, assumed smile, which betrayed concealed anguish of mind, while they spoke Cecilia's artless caution to avoid giving pain to her revered friend, created the most uneasy sensations in the bosom of the marchesa, who, while she now attempted to silence the involuntary anticipation of evil which oppressed the heart of the inno-

cent girl, began but too sensibly to partake of that irresistible melancholy which she in vain attempted to banish from the mind of Cecilia.

Under the influence of these depressing feelings, the marchesa proposed to retain her young favourite in the villa; but Cecilia was too well aware of the propriety of retiring to a secluded state to venture to accept an offer dictated more by affection and pity than by prudence, and instantly rejected the proposal, while her heart beat with the warmest sensations of grateful veneration; and she felt that she now derived from the kindness of her protectress the power of combating the fearful presages of her own disturbed imagination. But, although Cecilia was thus enabled partly to silence her own involuntary apprehensions of impending trouble and danger, she had occasioned so much serious anxiety to the marchesa, that the latter could now scarcely be prevailed upon to consent to her undertaking the projected removal. The amiable girl condemned the weakness to which she had yielded herself aprey; and, soon divested of her own terrors, she at length succeeded in hushing those of the marchesa, who now attributed the melancholy of her young *protegée* to the timid repugnance which she believed her to suffer at the idea of entering a society of strangers.

In thus mutually reconciling each other to an unavoidable separation, the marchesa

and Cecilia continued to converse together till the former was obliged to dress, to receive a party expected that evening at the villa.

When the marchesa's woman now attended at the toilet of her lady, Cecilia returned to her own apartment, where she found Lodelli busily occupied in preparing for their departure on the morrow.

The cheerful countenance of this faithful creature, who, although she knew she was on the point of being secluded, with Cecilia, within the walls of a convent, a situation to which Lodelli had invariably expressed a most decided dislike, evinced so much innate affection, and so much unfeigned content to participate the fate of her young mistress, although it promised to prove so inimical to her own ideas of happiness, that Cecilia could not forbear looking earnestly upon her with that pensive smile of heart-approving gratitude that spoke at once her own gratified feelings, and rewarded the good humour of Lodelli.

"Ah, signora mio!" exclaimed she, "that is the first smile that I have seen on your beautiful face for a long time; and as it is a sure sign that you are glad to get away from this strange, out of the way, grand, good for nothing place, where there is no happiness to be found, for all their finery, and music, and glittering gold, why, I don't care how soon I was away from it myself, although we are going into a convent. But then it may not be a *very dark* one, perhaps; but if it is, we can say

our prayers there in peace, at least; and that is more than we can do here, signora. Blessed saints! I am sure I shall have sins enough to confess when I get there; for I have been to confession but three times since we came into this family."

Cecilia, who had observed that both the marchese and his household were rather exact in the performance of the ceremonious duties of religion, and who had thrice accompanied the marchesa to private confession since her residence under her protection, now looked enquiringly on Lodelli, who, perfectly understanding her glance, continued:—

"Ah, signora! you may look surprised, and perhaps doubt my word; but 'tis very true indeed. I never have been able to say my prayers in peace ever since I left our own dear cottage. Ah! how beautiful it was of a moonlight night to kneel before the little ebony crucifix that hung just near the lattice of my own neat room, and when I heard the bell of the priory chiming for midnight service, repeat my *Ave's*, and pray the saints to guard my dear ladies and myself from the goblins of the night. Ah! those were happy times when I used to be so frightened at passing the garden-gate, just where the old walnut-tree grows, for fear of seeing poor Jerome's ghost; and when my dear lady the signora used to smile so sadly, and yet so good-naturedly at my fears, and——"

The half-suppressed sighs of Cecilia,

who had now sunk on a chair, and whose lovely face was bedewed with the tears of the remembrances and regrets which the simple speech of Lodelli had renewed in her mind, roused the whole attention of the latter, who, on looking round from her employment, and not understanding what had occasioned this sudden burst of grief, unconsciously increased the distress of Cecilia, in endeavouring to sooth her affliction, by loudly lamenting that she had never seen such unhappiness at the cottage, and by praying all the saints in the calendar to punish those vile wretches who had run away with her dear lady and old Guispardo.

In this strain of mingled lamentation, prayer, and invective, the simple Lodelli, by her frequent recurrence to the days of Cecilia's happiness, so much heightened the heartfelt and sorrowful recollections of the latter, that she was at length compelled to request the mistaken but faithful attendant to retire, and leave her for a while to meditation and prayer.

Most reluctantly Lodelli obeyed; and Cecilia, now overwhelmed by the contending feelings of her mind, yielded to the grief of her heart—a grief which, in despite of all her pious efforts to subdue it, was nearly uncontroulable. Every past scene of her life, from childhood's early dawn to the present sad hour, arose successively to her fancy, and tortured her with all the agonizing regrets which the

contrast of tranquil felicity, and harrowing, wearying misfortune, seldom fails to inflict on a heart of sensibility.

In this most unenviable state of mind she continued some time, till the voice of Lodelli, humbly soliciting admission, drew her from the indulgence of her sorrows. Faintly desiring her attendant to enter, she dried her tears, and retired to the latticed window of her chamber, to avoid the observation of the affectionate Lodelli, who now instantly entered; and as she unclosed the door, the soft sounds of distant music from the saloons beneath was distinctly heard.

Cecilia, although informed that a party was that evening to be entertained at the villa, was, nevertheless, much surprised at hearing such indications of gaiety and happiness, at a time when, as she imagined, the only son of the marchese was still confined to his apartment, in consequence of the treacherous attack of Faenza. Struck with the singularity of the circumstance, she now enquired whether a large company was assembled.

"O yes, signora; there is above fifty cavaliers and ladies in the grand saloons, and amongst them is that mild, good lady, the Contessa di Luzzana, and many more that you have seen, signora; and they say that all this music and rejoicing is because the Signor Leonardo has come down among them this evening, although, poor soul, he looks so pale and wan, that he seems more

fit for his grave than for such mirthful doings."

Cecilia would have been really pleased with the information that Leonardo was so far recovered as to be permitted to mingle with the gay society then assembled, had not Lodelli's account of his personal appearance darkened the gleam of satisfaction which the commencement of her speech had communicated. The amiable girl now deeply sighed as she reflected on the unhappiness which the marchesa silently endured respecting her son, while, with a delicacy that spoke the most tender consideration, she had invariably forborne to give utterance to her feelings on the occasion, lest Cecilia, as the innocent cause of Leonardo's sufferings, should construe the voice of complaint into that of reproach.

While these momentary reflections passed in the mind of Cecilia, Lodelli arranged the evening repast, and now, with respectful and affectionate importunity, entreated her lady to taste the fruits and preserves which had been so carefully selected to tempt her appetite. Cecilia mechanically took her place at the little table, but could not be prevailed upon to attempt to partake the meal, and soon afterwards retired to her chamber for the night, leaving Lodelli to repose, as she had of late usually done, on a couch in the dressing-room.

The night was uncommonly dark, and the gloomy stillness of the air seemed to portend a tempest. As Cecilia closed the

door of her chamber, and accidentally turned her eyes towards the window, a faint flash of pale lightning gleamed through the casements, and transiently illuminated the door leading into the oratory, and which, being situated in an obscure and dark corner of the room, otherwise would now have been concealed from the view of Cecilia by the shade of the hangings of the bed.

This trifling incident recalled to her mind all the horrors of the night on which she had beheld a spectral form, and which she believed still haunted that sacred recess. Her spirits, already uncommonly weakened by excessive grief and agitation, were now wholly unequal to the encountering new causes for emotion and dread; and she stood trembling and irresolute whether to retire immediately to her bed or return to the dressing-room, and call Lodelli to pass the night with her. The fear of terrifying her faithful attendant by such an unusual request deterred her from the latter step; but she could not summon courage sufficient to enable her to decide upon retiring to repose, although she dreaded to remain up. After some time, however, passed in her usual devotions, she felt herself more composed, but by no means inclined to sleep; and perceiving that the dark clouds which had recently overspread the heavens were already dispersed, she seated herself at the window, and marked the almost imperceptible

course of the planets through skies serene and clear. Soothed and tranquillized by the contemplation of those celestial systems, whose view abstracts the mind from all sublunary concerns, and leads the imagination to transporting visions of worlds unknown, Cecilia perceived not the fleeting lapse of time, till a loud noise, as if of something falling, and which seemed to proceed from the oratory, effectually called her attention, and awakened her to all the excess of human apprehensions and alarms. For one moment she did not possess power either to move or shriek; but a repetition of the appalling sounds, and the sudden bursting open of the door of the oratory, raised her feelings to agony, and with a piercing scream she sprung up, and flying towards the door leading into the dressing-room, flung it open, and retaining strength only to reach the couch occupied by Lodelli, fell senseless on the floor.

CHAP. V.

WHAT was the amazement of Cecilia, when restored to animation, to perceive herself supported in the arms of Orazio, while Lodelli was running about the room, distractedly calling upon the name of her lady, and searching for restorative essences. Hastily disengaging herself from the sup port of Orazio, the trembling and asto-

nished Cecilia, with looks of unfeigned dismay and inquietude, enquired what had occasioned his singular visit.

In a voice agitated, but timidly respectful, Orazio informed her that to accident alone must be attributed his so unseasonable intrusion.

" On the dispersion of the company, I was retiring to my apartment; but being unattended, and the lights in one of the galleries leading to that side of the villa in which the room I occupy is situated, having expired, I missed my way; and this unpremeditated inadvertence has thus conducted me to your apartments, Signora Cecilia," proceeded Orazio, with hesitating timidity, and then offered every possible apology for the unintentional intrusion which had so much terrified her.

Cecilia, agitated beyond expression, silently bowed her head to these apologies, and then directed Lodelli to take one of the lamps, and conduct the signor from her apartment.

" The signor had better return by the way he came, signora mio," observed Lodelli: " it would be so odd if any of the servants were to meet him coming out of this room into the grand corridor." And she was leading the way through the chamber to the oratory, when Orazio, in a tone of earnest persuasion, implored Cecilia's permission to remain a few moments longer in her presence, alleging, as his excuse for so strange a request, that he had

important reasons for entreating her attention at such a moment.

The delicate sense of propriety, carefully cherished by the timid girl, made her shrink from granting him even a moment's hearing; but Orazio, as if sensible that she would not yield her assent to his request, paused but an instant ere he added:

"I have this night seen the Contessa di Luzzana. From this lady I have learnt that you, signora, had been requested by her to suffer me to see you at the Villa di Luzzana; and that this private interview was solicited by me, under the plea of having the most particular communications to make to yourself alone. Permit me then to avail myself of this singularly fortunate opportunity of assuring you, that I never addressed the contessa on such an occasion; and that the billet which she received, as from me, was never penned by my hand."

A tremulous exclamation of astonishment now fell from the lips of Cecilia; and, with eagerness, she demanded who then was the author of that singular request.

Orazio assured her that he could not decidedly say who he ought to suspect of having used his name in so strange an affair; and then acquainting her that the Contessa di Luzzana had given the billet into his possession, presented it for her perusal.

The first glance which Cecilia cast on the hand-writing struck her with new horror and dismay, for she instantly recog-

nised it as that of Angelo Guicciardini! Feebly she pronounced that fearful name: the paper dropped from her hands, and she sat pale and motionless.

Orazio seemed transfixed with wonder. In deep emotion, he repeated the name, and, starting, snatched up the billet, and, with eager eyes, perused the contents, and examined the writing. This, however, was but the spontaneous effect of the impulse of the moment; for he had never before seen the hand-writing of the robber Angelo, and consequently was inadequate to judge of its identity. Shocked at having subjected Cecilia to such distress as he perceived this incident had occasioned her, he knew not how to apologize, and could only continue to gaze in silent anguish on the lovely girl, as she now hid her beauteous face with her hands, in order to conceal the uncontroulable tears that flowed from her eyes.

A faint convulsive sigh, the sad expression of her grief, instantaneously deprived Orazio of all recollection and self-command, and listening only to the impetuous language of his heart, he now threw himself at her feet, and, with all the animated fervor of sincere and ardent affection, implored her to calm her sorrows, and vowed to penetrate every mystery that attended her fate; to force Angelo Guicciardini to confess who she really was; and to obtain some positive information of her mother's situation, or to perish in these attempts.

Terrified at his ardour, and overwhelmed with confusion by the unguarded expression of his feelings, Cecilia arose, and timidly waving her hand for him to depart, was retreating from him, when hastily seizing her robe, he continued :—

"Oh, stay, adored Cecilia! Reserve and caution are now beyond my power. I cannot support the torture of beholding you thus coldly banish me from your sight, even at the moment when we are on the point of a separation, dreaded by me as the annihilation of every hope which can render life a blessing. It is too late to conceal the sentiments with which you have inspired my heart. Fame and fortune are no longer valuable to me but as the means of becoming worthy of soliciting the compassion of her, whose transcendent virtues and unequalled loveliness have imprinted on my soul those indelible characters of affection which even death shall not obliterate; for they are congenial with the angel purity of the lovely being who has inspired them. Ah, then, beloved, idolized Cecilia! ameliorate the torments I endure, by the invaluable assurance that you do not despise and fear me as an evasive dissembler, unworthy of possessing either your confidence or your esteem. Oh! deign to intimate, that should you find me not wholly undeserving of your favour, you will listen to my prayers that you will be mine; and then no earthly power, no earthly consideration, can deprive me of

the exquisite felicity of devoting myself to her alone, whose image rules each impulse of my soul."

The emotions with which Cecilia had listened to this most unexpected declaration are not to be described. It would be vain to attempt to pourtray them. If love for one short moment predominated in her trembling bosom, all its tender influence was banished by the appalling recollection that the daughter of the robber Angelo must never dare to indulge the visionary dreams of bliss which a romantic and enthusiastic young man, blinded by the impetuosity of his feelings, thus presumed to paint to her imagination; and while the dreadful struggle between the tender affection of her heart and the rigid virtue of her mind continued, she averted her face from the view of her impassioned lover; but the instant he ceased to speak, and she no longer felt the thrilling influence of his persuasive voice vibrate on her soul, she turned towards him with a look, such as a reproving angel might wear when commanding a mortal to the exertion of that reason with which heaven had so peculiarly endowed his race; and in a voice, the assumed austerity of which could not deprive it of its plaintive sweetness, said—

"I have suffered you, signor, to conclude an address which I should deem the deepest insult to my feelings and my principles, could I suppose that you were capable of an intention of wounding the mind of one,

whose misfortunes have already reduced her to the most humiliated state. As the daughter of Angelo Guicciardini, to reply seriously to your romantic professions would be as absurd as to suppose that, when just reflection presents this interview in its proper light to your mind, you will not blush at the recollection of having requested the regards of one whose very name would brand you with dishonour, and crush the restored dignities of your illustrious house with irreparable disgrace. I pardon you, signor," added the lovely girl, deeply affected with the anguish and distraction which now appeared in the looks of Orazio. "Retire; and bear with you the assurance that I shall not cease to remember with gratitude the interest you have professed to feel for my fate, even while I cannot forbear condemning the imprudence of which you have now been guilty."

Cecilia now once more retreated towards the anti-room, intending to wait there while Lodelli should conduct Orazio through her chamber to the oratory, but again he caught her robe, and bending his knee, articulated, in a voice scarcely audible:—

"Cecilia, you have severely punished my temerity—my inconsiderate, culpable precipitancy. I will not again offend thy pure and noble mind by the repetition of vows engraven on my soul. I will go from your presence as you desire; and the

recollection of this night shall animate me ever more to persevere in virtue; and to command my feelings till their display can no longer subject me to the anguish and torture which I have now justly endured. Adieu! adieu!" he added, "may every consolation which conscious innocence and virtue can bestow, guard your steps and support you in each moment of trial.—And, oh, Cecilia! angelic maid! if the certainty of possessing earthly friends most anxious for your happiness can alleviate thy sorrow, believe that there are those who would sacrifice even life itself, to ensure to you one hour of tranquillity."

Bending with impassioned tenderness over the trembling hand of Cecilia, which he now ventured to press, he hastily arose, and with one more lingering glance fixed on the lovely object of his indelible affection, followed Lodelli from the room, while Cecilia, now wholly subdued by her long restrained emotion, sunk on a sofa and wept violently.

The sound of Lodelli's returning footsteps restored her to a sense of the imprudence of yielding unresistingly to her feelings, and she made an effort to check her tears; but her grief was beyond controul, and she failed in the attempt.

For a moment poor Lodelli stood a silent and dismayed spectatress of this agony of sorrow; but her distress soon found vent in a torrent of words, and while she loudly bewailed the unhappiness of her lady, she

most vehemently inveighed against those whom she supposed to be the authors of her present trouble.

"Oh, that ever I should have lived to see such doleful times! Oh, that I had married old Jerome rather than have had my heart broken by seeing my dear young lady vexed and teized out of her senses in such a dismal manner!" exclaimed this affectionate creature. "I'll forfeit my last new rosary, and the relic Father Ascollini sold me, and that once belonged to pious Peter the hermit, if that abominable, spiteful, ugly, conceited, proud thing, that Signora di Rovenza is not at the bottom of all these wicked, terrifying falsehoods; and has contrived to have them put into your mind, Signora, only to kill you downright with fright and fretting. Santa Virgine! I don't believe a word of it!" And Lodelli, devoutly crossing herself, seemed to confirm the sincerity of her asseveration by the solemnity of her action.

Happily for the afflicted Cecilia, the animated anger of her attendant, and the vivacity with which she gave utterance to her vexation, added to her strange expressions, excited both surprise and interest in the bosom of the former, whose excessive emotion was now partly abated by the anxiety which she involuntarily felt to learn what Lodelli alluded to when she had said she did not believe a word of it.

"And what is it that you are thus inclined

to doubt, Lodelli?" feebly asked the sorrowing girl.

"What, signora!—why what should I doubt but that you are the daughter of that great terrible robber Angelo Guicciardini?" exclaimed Lodelli in reply.

Horror-stricken and confounded by the conviction that she had so unguardedly betrayed this dreadful secret by conversing with Orazio in the presence of Lodelli, Cecilia heaved a deep sigh of unutterable distress, and sunk nearly fainting on the sofa.

The lamentations of Lodelli were now renewed, and while endeavouring to recover Cecilia to sensibility, she still persisted that nothing less than the word of a saint from heaven could make her believe such an odious, wicked untruth, although her dear young lady was so simple as to be persuaded to think that such an unlikely thing was true. Totally overwhelmed by the agitation of her mind, Cecilia had neither power nor inclination to listen farther to this harrowing subject, and merely directing Lodelli to observe an inviolable silence as to what she had that night both seen and heard, she retired into her chamber under the plea of seeking repose; but, alas! tears and sighs of the keenest woe alone occupied her solitary hours.

With ideas too much distracted to permit reflection, she thus continued till she

was summoned to commence her journey, by being informed by Lodelli, that the carriage was already in waiting, and that the family were assembled in one of the saloons to receive her farewel. This information fully awakened her to a sense of her situation.

She had entirely forgotten that she was to meet the marchese and marchesa in the breakfast-saloon, and she now trembled at the idea of exhibiting herself such an image of woe to those who might be assembled on the occasion. There was, however, no possibility of avoiding this painful interview, and while she arranged her travelling dress, she endeavoured to regain some appearance of composure; and at length, drawing a slight veil of black gauze forward to shade her pale but lovely features from the scrutiny to which she might be exposed, she quitted her apartment without one single sensation of regret, and descended to the saloon, followed by Lodelli, who, with more than usual alacrity, ran to summon some of the domestics to assist in conveying the trunks of her lady to the carriage.

The marchese, the marchesa, and the Signora della Albina, were the only personages whom Cecilia found in the breakfast-saloon.

As she entered, the marchese complaisantly arose and led her into the room, and the lovely girl was now alternately enfolded to the compassionating bosoms of her amiable

protectress and the signora her friend. For some moments they mutually wept in silence. At length the marchesa, in faultering accents, said—"We receive you thus privately, my dear Cecilia, that your delicate and susceptible mind may be spared the pain which a formal and ceremonious adieu to the whole family might occasion you to feel."

"Believe me, signora," added the marchese, rather abruptly interrupting his lady, "when I assure you that your departure fills us with regret; nor can I disguise how much I lament that the late unpleasant discovery should have necessitated us to suffer you to remove from beneath our own immediate protection. In the convent to which you are going, you will, however, receive every possible attention which your situation demands, and permit me to add my assurances to those which I understand you have already accepted from the marchesa, that we shall always feel interested in your welfare; and in case your circumstances should compel you to take the veil, will evince the esteem with which your amiable qualities have inspired us, by the liberality of your dower."

Cecilia, too much agitated to find words to reply to this ostentatious speech, silently bowed her acknowledgments. Refreshments were now offered to her, and to avoid the appearance of affected emotion she received some coffee.

An embarrassing and painful silence now

ensued, till Cecilia arose to take her final adieu. Again the marchesa and the signora embraced her with tears; the lovely girl faultered her grateful sense of their goodness; expressed her wishes for the felicity of the whole family, and then timidly gave her hand to the marchese, who waited to conduct her to the carriage. Cecilia, drawing her veil still closer over her tearful countenance, suffered the marchese to lead her across the vestibule and beneath the noble porticoed entrance, without daring to raise her eyes, lest they should encounter Orazio, whom, at this moment, she almost dreaded to behold.

On her entering the carriage, the marchese, in a voice of extreme kindness, wished her every possible happiness, and she fancied she perceived an expression of unfeigned melancholy steal over his features, as he slowly retreated towards the steps of the portico with his eyes still fixed upon herself. Lodelli was already in the carriage. It was a handsome vehicle belonging to the marchesa, and proper attendants, who had been appointed to escort her to Verona, were in waiting. The marchese, once more bowing complaisantly to the weeping girl, gave a signal to one of the servants to order the carriage to proceed; and in the next moment Cecilia was rapidly borne from that spot where she had passed so many hours of fear, hope, expectation, grief, and disappointment.

CHAP. VI.

No regretful emotions, save only those which she felt at having parted from the marchesa, the Signora della Albina, and Orazio, affected the mind of Cecilia on leaving the Villa di Rovenza; but her ideas were still too much disturbed by the extraordinary events which had occurred during her residence in the Rovenza family, to suffer her to reflect with composure on any of the circumstances which now successively crowded on her memory. Although she did not regret her departure from the Villa di Rovenza, she certainly saw but small reason to anticipate any pleasing result to her journey, as she could not indulge the hope that her reception at the Convent of Santa Agatha would prove as favourable as the benevolent marchese had endeavoured to induce her to expect. With a despondent heart she turned her sad eyes towards the lawn, beside which the broad shaded avenue ran, and, by a sudden curve in the road, obtained at this moment a full view of the villa. Its white turrets and marble porticoes, illumined by the morning sun, and shaded by the luxuriant foliage of the tall poplars and shrubs that waved around them, looked like the elegant abode of serenity and virtue. The heart of Cecilia recoiled from the sad reality imprinted by the recollection of Ottavania's malice, and the many mortifications that

this proud, unfeeling young woman had inflicted on her friendless state. Once more she drew back in the carriage, and would have sunk into the silent contemplation of her sorrows, had the ill-restrained loquacity of Lodelli been capable of longer controul. Most impatiently had the latter marked the sorrowful taciturnity of her lady, and after several half-breathed expressions, which had been wholly unnoticed by Cecilia, she begged her lady to observe what a fine carriage they were seated in, and added some encomiums on the marchese, who, she now declared, had proved himself to be a much more generous and good-natured signor than ever she had supposed him to be.

As the marchese had never been a favorite of Lodelli's, and as Cecilia was rather desirous of not indulging the train of distracting thoughts which usually harassed her mind, she now enquired in what manner the Marchese di Rovenza had effected such an alteration in her former opinion of him.

"Why, signora, just as I was going up stairs to tell you that the carriage was ready, I met his excellenza in the hall, and he told me that the Major-domo Caltorina wanted to see me as soon as I was at leisure; and so when I had attended you down again, and had told Pietro and Paoli to place your things in the carriage, I went to the major-domo's room. And what do you think he wanted with me, signora?—

Only to give me an elegant purse quite full of ducats, and he said I might keep them for your use, signora; and then he gave me a smaller one for myself, and told me that the marchese had ordered me that, because he had been so well pleased with my fidelity to you. Now, I said, that I did not deserve nor want to be paid for liking you, signora, as that was no great merit of mine, for that every body that knew you must like you whether they would or not, and——"

"Did you take those purses then?" earnestly enquired Cecilia.

"Yes, to be sure, Signora, how could I help it? Certainly the marchese would have been offended if they had been refused, when he had been so generous and so considerate as to order them. At first I did not want to take them, but—but I thought it would look so odd, and so proud to——"

The deep convulsive sighs of Cecilia now interrupted Lodelli. The hapless girl had shrunk from the idea of these pecuniary obligations, but the words of her servant most keenly reminded her that she had no other alternative than to accept the bounty of the marchese to preserve her from present want, and she acutely felt that she was not entitled to display an unavailing and fastidious pride on the occasion.

Lodelli, who had just sense enough to perceive that the subject of her discourse had made her lady very uneasy, now attempted to repair her fault by pointing out

to her notice the little market boats, which, loaded with luxuriant fruits, blooming flowers, and provisions, were now swiftly gliding down the rapid flowing Brenta to Venice.

The number of the gaily painted boats, their varied appearance, the plaintive carols and lively songs of the peasant girls, seated beneath the shading awnings; the beauty of the early morning, and the diversified, luxuriant scenery which skirted the road and extended along the river's bank, were, however, beheld by Cecilia with emotions of that melancholy, but not envious regret, which, while it causes the hearts of the unfortunate to contrast their own sad state with the happiness of others, and throws even a gloomy shade over the fairest beauties of nature, still permits the enjoyment of that degree of pensive pleasure which results from the consciousness that, although the infirmity incidental to humanity may induce us to repine at our own troubles, we can yet receive satisfaction and consolation in beholding the felicity of some of our fellow-beings.

In the pleasing contemplation of those attractive and animated objects which on every side met her view, Cecilia insensibly found her thoughts diverted from the sad and perplexing subjects which but too constantly occupied them, and which ofttimes refused even to be subdued by every religious and pious argument which virtue dictated.

At length, when the road turned off in another direction, and the carriage ascended the lonely wood-heights to the westward, she relapsed into her former sadness, nor could all the well-meant efforts of Lodelli long interrupt her melancholy abstraction.

Several times during the course of the day they stopped to change horses, and to take refreshments, but Cecilia had no possible trouble on the occasion, as, by the marchese's care, a servant preceded the carriage, and gave every requisite order.

The night was passed at the post-house of a small village, and at the earliest dawn of day the journey was continued in the same manner as on the preceding day.

The country seemed in general fertile, pleasant, and luxuriant, but in some parts lonely and uncultivated even to wildness; wooded hills and long extended vales, reaching to the foot of the tall majestic Alps, were frequently contrasted with the corn-fields; and all the luxuriance of the vine-yards, mulberry and olive plantations; rich groves of orange, citron, and lemon; while in other parts the road wound along deeply descending precipices overhung by rocks of marble and granite; and not unfrequently the winding sheep walk, and the lowly hamlets of the secluded plains, burst on the view in all the fairy tints which distance gives from between the openings of some rugged cliffs; or long extending lakes were dimly seen through the dark,

moaning forests which clothed the mountain's sides.

The mind of Cecilia gradually acquired some share of composure as she proceeded on this journey, but it was not tranquil composure; it was that silent mournful resignation which the incapacity of rendering ourselves happy as we desire, imparts, that gave an appearance of returning serenity to her pensive looks. She was, however, now sufficiently calm and collected to resolve on making herself as contented as possible in the new habitation which was to be the termination of her travels; and to wait in patient expectation, and, if possible, in hope, the wished for, but dreaded elucidation of her parent's and her own story.

That she was really the daughter of Angelo Guicciardini, every circumstance had combined, she imagined, to convince her; and above all his having used the name of Orazio to obtain an opportunity of seeing her at the Villa di Luzzana. How he had intended to accomplish this she was not able to conjecture, but she justly apprehended that he had formed some design of carrying her off, and which could not have been so well executed at the Villa di Rovenza, where a numerous household might have discovered and defeated his plans, as in the retired residence of the Contessa di Luzzana. As Cecilia shudderingly reflected upon this strange incident, she could not forbear a

mental aspiration of gratitude to heaven for having been preserved from such an event: for although she considered Angelo as her parent, she unceasingly prayed that she might never be exposed to the misery of beholding him, unless it should be in such a situation as her tears and entreaties might induce him to relinquish a mode of life, the faintest contemplation of which filled her mind with horror unutterable. But this was a subject which she durst not long reflect upon, for she was nearly distracted at one moment lest this wretched man should fall into the hands of justice, and at another overwhelmed with enanguished grief, shame, or despair, at the dreadful probability of her relationship to him being proved beyond all possibility of doubt.

Not daring, therefore, to think too deeply on the dreadful causes of her sorrow, she again endeavoured to raise her thoughts to heaven, from whence, alas! they had been too much abstracted by the repeated occurrence of new troubles which she had almost daily encountered; and on the eve of the second day of her journey she certainly felt some relief from the impetuosity of her griefs.

The varied features of the country;--the novelty of her situation, travelling almost unprotected; and the anticipation of her reception at the convent, alternately engaged some portion of her attention, as the dark shadows of the closing evening

began to overspread the distant landscapes, and made her sigh to be within those sacred walls where peace and security might, notwithstanding all her fears, be found.

On the morrow she had been informed her journey would end, and now, with anxious eye she looked forward through the mists of evening for the spires of Verona, which she expected to reach soon after sun-set. But the misfortunes of Cecilia seemed to be far from their termination; for as she was within a league of a town she believed to be that of her destination, and the carriage slowly proceeding along the brow of a hill which commanded an extensive view, now but faintly distinguished in the moon-light, it was surrounded by a party of men on horseback, some of whom secured the servants of the marchese, while others forced the fainting girl from the vehicle, and bore her and Lodelli into another carriage, which immediately proceeded down the hill with the utmost velocity, and turned into an unfrequented road in a direction contrary to the town, the spire of which she had just seen.

The swift motion of the carriage, and the screams of the terrified Lodelli, soon recalled Cecilia to sensibility; but several moments elapsed ere she could credit the dreadful reality of her situation, and she remained in that state of torpor which

amazement and dread sometimes occasion; while Lodelli, with mingled sobs and exclamations to the saints, continued to exclaim:—

"Oh, San Peitro! and all his holy angels, help us! What will become of us, signora!—Do you know where we are going? Oh! if I could but guess whether it is that terrible Count Weil— Weil—what's his name, that carried off my dear Padrona, your lady mother, or your fa——, that is, I mean, whether the Signor Angelo Guicciardini has served us this trick."

Cecilia, whose thoughts were now employed with equal earnestness on the same points, was far more inclined to attribute the present incident to Angelo Guicciardini than to the Count de Weilburgh, for had not Angelo, by his strange and sudden appearance in the gardens of the Villa di Rovenza, and by his attempt to draw her to the Villa di Luzzana, evinced some deep design of removing her from the protection of the Rovenza family? A few moments' reflection almost confirmed this supposition into a full belief that her conjecture was just.---Perhaps her mother had been liberated from the power of the Count de Weilburgh, and she was now conveying to the arms of that beloved parent. For one instant this idea imparted the liveliest emotion of joy to the beating heart of Cecilia, till the dreadful thoughts that she might in this case be also on the eve of an inter-

view with that extraordinary man whom she so much dreaded to call father, plunged her anew into the utmost grief and alarm.

Again, her fears reverted to the Count de Weilburgh, and in the harrowing incertitude of her mind, she imagined that no certainty could be more dreadful than that state of suspense which added innumerable horrors to apprehension.

Whilst these reflections were rapidly passing in the mind of Cecilia, Lodelli sat trembling and shivering, and so much affrighted, that she seemed to have lost all power to open her lips, till her lady, suddenly struck with sorrow and regret at the idea that poor Lodelli would be exposed to all the troubles and dangers which, it seemed but too probable, she was herself on the eve of encountering, involuntarily uttered an expression indicative of her unfeigned concern on the occasion.

"Oh, don't mind me, signora mio,---don't mind me," trembling cried Lodelli, her teeth chattering, and her voice nearly inarticulate from terror---"If you escape harm, I don't care for myself. If they would be content with killing me only, it would not be so bad. But to see you at the mercy of such a desperate, horrible looking——" Poor Lodelli could not finish her sentence, for her loud sobs wholly impeded her utterance.

Cecilia, much affected by this artless proof of attachment, now compassionately endeavoured to quiet the alarms of the

young woman, by assurances that she was convinced that they should not sustain any injury; and Lodelli, although evidently surprised at the courage of her lady, was nevertheless so much consoled by seeing her so apparently easy, that she soon lost the greater share of her terrors, and began to indulge in a thousand strange conjectures as to who had interrupted their journey in so extraordinary a manner.

Cecilia suffered her to amuse herself with her surmises, and merely telling her to be of good courage, betrayed not the least hint of her own ideas on the subject.

CHAP. VII.

For several hours the carriage continued to proceed with as quick a pace as steep ascents and rugged roads would permit. About midnight they stopped at the foot of a lonely hill, and while fresh mules were harnessed to the carriage, some slight refreshments were handed to Cecilia by a man, who, cautiously unclosing the door, displayed what he had presented to her view by the light of a dark lantern, which for an instant he reflected on the refreshments, and disappeared, fastening the door of the carriage after him.

A flask of wine and some preserved fruits, with a few cakes and oranges in a small basket, were the refreshments he had

given; and of these Cecilia did not now hesitate to partake, notwithstanding the total darkness which environed her, extremely disconcerted her. This obstacle, however, did not affect Lodelli, who most joyfully accepted a portion, and ate with an avidity to which, Cecilia's partaking the frugal meal, added even chearfulness.

In a few minutes the carriage proceeded as before, and Cecilia now sinking into silent reflection, her wearied attendant fell into a slumber.

The reflections of Cecilia were, as usual, by no means calculated to chear her spirits, or impart much fortitude to her mind: but happily in her present trying situation, she was not disposed to yield to the influences of apprehension; and reasonably expecting that she should speedily have occasion for the utmost exertion of all the courage she could summon, she ceased not to endeavour to strengthen her mind by praying for the return of that pious dependence on the will of heaven, which she had ever found to be her firmest and best support under every afflicting exigency.

The dawning light fast stealing over the mountain tops, at length disclosed to her view the dreary road she was travelling, and the figures of some of the men, who, she now perceived, still surrounded the carriage. They were all habited alike in black, and as the light increased, she discovered that their faces were concealed by

black vizors; while in their caps waved small plumes of red feathers.

The singularity of their appearance—their uniform dress, and the gravity of their air, as, without seeming to exchange a word with each other, they kept pace with the carriage, excited in the bosom of Cecilia the most extraordinary ideas, but before she could form any decisive opinion as to what might have been the reason wherefore Angelo Guicciardini should suffer these men, whom she still believed to belong to him, to appear in a style of dress which must unavoidably expose them to much observation, Lodelli suddenly awaked, and, on the very first view she caught of their guards, gave a faint shriek, and in a voice of indescribable terror exclaimed, "Ah, Santa Virgine! are not those dreadful looking men officers of the Inquisition?"

Astonished, horror-struck and pale, Cecilia felt these fearful words beat on her heart as the knell of death. The instantaneous supposition that possibly her wretched father, after having escaped the hands of justice at Venice, had been arrested by the Inquisition of Rome on some charge of sacrilege, and that she was by some means involved in his fate, overwhelmed her mind with unspeakable agonies, and she fainted.

Lodelli, far more alarmed by the insensibility of her lady than she had actually been by the idea that they were in the

custody of the officers of the Inquisition, now screamed so violently that her cries were heard by some of the men nearest the carriage, and two of them immediately ordered the driver to stop, and hastily opening the door, roughly enquired what was the matter.

"My lady is dead!—my lady is dead!" shrieked Lodelli, and indeed the lovely features of Cecilia exhibited every pallid trace of dissolution. "Oh, Signora mio! —Signora mio!" continued poor Lodelli, loudly sobbing, while one of the men raised the insensible form of Cecilia, and bore her from the carriage into the open air. Lodelli sprang out after them, still crying bitterly, and exclaiming, "You have all murdered my lady—I don't care if you flay me alive, or pinch me to death with your devilish hot irons, for I will say in spite of you all that it is your ugly, dreadful looks that have killed my dear signora." The men who carried Cecilia seemed too much interested in their care of their lovely burden to attend to the ravings of Lodelli, but several others gathered round her, and impeded her attempts to follow her lady, demanding the meaning of her words?

"Meaning!" cried the affrighted and enraged young woman, still struggling to force her way through the group of horsemen—"why, what meaning should I have but that the sight of you has killed my lady. You frightful, horrid looking mortals. I wonder you are not ashamed to

call yourselves holy, when you look like so many devils."

"Holy! holy!" repeated the men all at once, and a loud burst of boisterous laughter succeeded. "St. Jago! --- that a set of the bravest lads in all Italy should be accused of calling themselves holy! No no; you little, squalling witch; we leave the profession of holiness to those canting drones who, cooped up in their consecrated nests, slily enjoy all the good things of the world; whilst they thunder out of their sneaking holes torrents of anathemas and denunciations against a set of merry open hearted souls, who like to taste some of the sweets of life as well as themselves."

"What! and are not you all Inquisitors then!" exclaimed Lodelli, her countenance exhibiting the most whimsical expression of abating grief, wonder and rising joy.

"Inquisitors!"—echoed the group, "Inquisitors!—" Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha; and another peal of laughter burst from their lips, and resounded amongst the wild rocks that towered above the dreary road on one side, and along the deep glens that descended almost perpendicularly on the other. "Well, by St. Jago," continued one of the men, "but this is a good joke; a set of jovial, freeminded fellows to be taken for a band of holy Inquisitors! Ha, ha, ha, ha."

At this moment another of the men, hearing his companions calling Lodelli to

the assistance of her lady, made way for her to pass, and she flew with the rapidity of a hare to where Cecilia, supported by one of her guards, was half reclined amid some fragments of rock at a little distance from the road. She was still insensible, and this renewed all the distress of Lodelli, who, while she sprinkled the clear water, which gushed from a small spring amid the rocks, upon the fair face and hand of the lovely girl, loudly and incessantly called on her to revive; and assuring her that there were no wicked Inquisitors near, prayed her not to break her heart by letting her see her so long in her fit.

All the men had now gathered near the edge of the road, and were intently gazing on the fair sufferer, some peeping through the branches of the stunted oaks that grew amid the rocks, and others, elevated in their stirrups, attempted to catch a view of their lovely prisoner, by looking over the sharp and rugged crags that projected from the irregular cliffs.

Cecilia's veil had fallen off, and her bright hair hung in luxuriant disorder over her shoulders and forehead. Such beauty as her face and form displayed, had never before met the gaze of the ruffians, who now contemplated her with wonder, while the general murmur of admiration, distinguishable in their whispered observations, spoke at once their amazement at her unexampled loveliness, and the involuntary respect with which they regarded her.

By the cares of Lodelli, the lovely girl was soon restored to animation; but when, on re-opening her sad eyes, she suddenly encountered the gazing countenances of some of the men, whose now unmasked features displayed all the variety of their ferocious and depraved characters, she had nearly again relapsed into insensibility.

The voice of Lodelli, still assuring her that there was no immediate danger to be apprehended, and her perceiving that the men were slowly retiring on being called away by one of their companions, contributed to preserve her from returning inanimation, and, in a few minutes, she was sufficiently sensible to be capable of comprehending that she was not in the hands of any of the agents belonging to the holy office.

With this assurance, returned all her first idea that both herself and her attendant had been carried off by some of Angelo Guicciardini's men, as Lodelli, whisperingly added, that, although their guards were not officers of the Inquisition, she was sure, from their merriment and way of talking, that they were no better than a set of banditti.

In the hour of apprehended danger of a superior kind, we receive consolation from circumstances which, at any other period, would plunge us into the deepest misery. Cecilia, now relieved from the horrible dread that her criminal parent was in the power of those entitled to punish his enor-

mities, viewed her present situation without experiencing any great degree of terror, and when one of the men, who appeared to be the conductor of this enterprise, approached to enquire whether she was yet sufficiently recovered to return to the carriage, she was so far collected as to be capable of demanding by what authority they were conveying her she knew not whither. This man, making a slight obeisance, immediately replied, it was not in his power to give her any explanatory answer on the subject; but he could venture to assure her that if she thought proper to submit with resignation to her destiny, it would be no unpleasant one: and in evidence of his assertions, he added, that he had received orders to inform her, that it would be her own fault only, if she did not meet with every respect and accommodation on her journey which she could possible require. "But, signora," he continued, "if you should prove obstinately bent upon resisting a power from which you cannot escape, we shall be necessitated to treat you as a prisoner; otherwise, however, you may command any thing within our limits to obey. If you chuse to accompany us unreluctantly, we will suffer you to take rest and refreshment whenever you think proper to stop; but if you make the least attempt to regain your liberty, from that instant all indulgence and consideration must cease."

This information was delivered in a tone of such plain sincerity, that Cecilia could not doubt the veracity of the man who uttered it; but she did not hesitate to repeat her enquiry as to the name of the person who had assumed such an authority over her person and her attendant.

"As to that, signora, we must not inform you; but when I tell you that we act by the directions of one who has your welfare at heart, and who has, to be sure, a very just right to make you do as he pleases, I suppose you will be satisfied."

Cecilia was now indeed satisfied, fully satisfied, that Angelo Guicciardini was the employer and director of these men; and now, while she raised her beauteous eyes towards heaven, and implored the aid of the Most High to support her under the present and approaching hours of trial, she yielded in mental submission to the will of him whose sacred claims as a father on her obedience could not be resisted.

Meekly she then informed the leader of the band that she committed herself to his guidance, and merely requested to know whither they were journeying.

"Northward, as you may perceive, lady," was the laconic reply, as he pointed to the aerial summit of the Alps, whose gigantic heights and impenetrable hollows the travellers had been fast approaching.

Cecilia arose, and as her anxious eyes wandered on the fertile, winding vales, stretched at the feet of those stupendous

mountains, and then rested on the snowy summits of the Alps, glittering in the morning sun-beam, she sighed convulsively; and her vivid fancy, too true to give a pleasing illusion to her heart, pictured the dark caves and drear recesses amid those almost inaccessible heights, where perhaps the man whom she was fated to call father even then held dreadful converse with the lawless bands subjected to his command.

The scene of secret consultation—the death-like midnight hour, when, intent on plunder, the rapacious hordes steal forth to perpetrate their meditated crimes—the sighs of the despoiled traveller—and the triumphant feast of success; when, animated to unholy mirth, the robbers quaff the full goblet, and with exulting songs record the exploits of the night; all rose rapidly on her affrighted imagination, and her soul sickened at the images which the finger of truth presented, and chased away the illusions of hope by the dreadful representations of reality. In this awful moment the character of Angelo Guicciardini stood unveiled by the romantic guise with which the enthusiastic gratitude, the kind precaution of Orazio di Udina, had concealed its worst features. Cecilia drooped her head, and wept: they were such tears as virtue sheds when compelled to deplore the erring nature of mortality, and fixes her last hope in heaven.

This grief, so sad, so placid, yet so heartfelt, gave to the expressive eyes of

Cecilia that meek look of pensive sorrow and submissive gentleness so well calculated to lead the man who had been conversing with her, and who was still keenly observing her looks, into the idea that she was perfectly resigned to her fate. The satisfaction which this supposition afforded him was instantly manifested by his saying, "There is no occasion for you to weep so, signora; for since you seem disposed to be so gentle and prudent, I'll be sworn that you will have no cause to regret this journey. But the time is wearing away, lady; and, make all the haste we may, it will be three or four days before we arrive at the end of our travels. Are you well enough now to step into the carriage?"

Cecilia, who was not surprised at this information, as she imagined that these men would certainly conduct her by a circuitous route to the dreaded haunts of their captain, now silently moved towards the carriage; and, while supported by her faithful Lodelli, she cast a fearful glance around, she beheld before her the dreary and elevated regions of the Alps, and, far on the south-west, the luxuriant vales and richly cultivated heights, which would soon be lost to her view.

With agonizing emotion, she turned her eyes from the wide-extended prospect; and now the uncouth figures of her guards, as they slowly paced their mules along the edge of the almost perpen-

dicular precipice that skirted the grass-grown road, or suffered their weary beasts to graze on the stinted patches of verdure, thinly scattered amid the rocky heights, and loiteringly awaited her re-entering the vehicle, drew the attention of the afflicted girl; but soon the eager stare of curiosity and pleasure with which these men again regarded her caused her to shrink in terror from their view, and, concealing her face with her veil, she hurried into the carriage, followed by Lodelli, who now seemed fully resolved that her lady should not indulge in silent and melancholy reflections, while she herself retained the powers of speech, and therefore expatiated without reserve on their present awkward situation, and avowed her opinion that both her lady and herself had been carried off by order of Angelo Guicciardini. "But then, my dear young lady, if this is the case, we can't come to much harm, if it was to turn out at last that the rob——that is, that the——the Signor Guicciardini should prove to be your father. Very odd things come to pass sometimes, signora; and I have just remembered something that makes me think that there may be some truth in it after all. Indeed, signora, no one can tell what strange things happen in the world sometimes. I remember when I was a little girl that my grand-mother used to say, 'Lodelli,' says she, 'never mind the——"

"For mercy's sake, do not delay to inform me what strange occurrence can have

led you to believe that I am the daughter of——of——"

"Ah! I know who you mean to say, signora," interrupted Lodelli, gravely and significantly shaking her head: "so pray don't put yourself to the pain of speaking that ugly name. Ah, Santa Virgine! it's a sad affair when a dear, innocent child should be afraid to speak the name of her own father! Not that I should presume for to say that he really is; but when I recollect——"

Again Cecilia implored her to be brief, while the agonizing suspense depicted on her expressive features betrayed how much she wished, yet feared, to hear the circumstance with which she had entreated to be made acquainted

Lodelli was not insensible to the painful anxiety expressed by her lady; but she could not depart from her usual methodical style; and, after much interlocution, she informed Cecilia, that on the night after Orazio's entrance into the cottage, she had seen the Signora di Berlotti in the orangery at midnight with a stranger, whose tall figure and deep sonorous voice she now, on recollection, thought exactly resembled those of the robber Angelo. "I was quite frightened at the time, signora, and could not tell what to make of my padrona's being out and alone with a man at such an hour, and I was going to make a great outcry, but I thought I would stop a moment before I alarmed you, and listen whether

there was any occasion to do so; and I soon found out that my lady was walking quietly with this strange cavalier, though, as they softly passed under my lattice, I thought I heard the signora sob and sigh sadly; and presently the stranger said: 'No, I will never claim her unless his success is answerable to my hopes.' He then said some other words that I could not hear, because the boughs of the trees rustled so against the high feathers in his cap, and because the signora and he soon after quitted that walk. In a little bit after, I heard my lady come in and steal up to her room. The next morning, however, I did venture to tell my lady that I had seen her with the cavalier in the garden: and oh! how pale and vexed she did look! I was half sorry and afraid for what I had said; but the dear, good signora soon quieted my fears, by telling me that she was not at all angry with me, and would think no more of my imprudent curiosity, if I would take care and not mention what I had seen either to you, signora, or to any one else. I promised to obey her faithfully; and I'm sure I did keep the secret a long while, though, St. Bridget forgive me for it, it has been at the tip of my tongue a hundred times, when I was in want of something to to say amuse you, signora. But, for all that, I don't believe but what I should have kept the secret to the very last, if it had'nt been for what you suspect about the Signor Angelo's being re-

lated to you; and I do think that if ever my lady finds out that I told it to you, signora—that is, if ever we should see her again—she would never be angry with me, if I was to tell her that I discovered all only to cheer up your spirits at such a time as this. But, holy saints! why, dear signora, you look paler and sadder than ever! Ah! this is my old luck. When I was a little one, my grandmother always said, that when I wanted to make people laugh, I always used to make them cry; and that when I tried to make them cry, they were sure to laugh. Now, who would have thought, signora, that when I told you all this only to persuade you that if the—— the Signor Angelo Guicciardini might be your own very, very father, he would never ill-use you, that, instead of being pleased, you should be so sorrowful."

"Say no more, my good Lodelli," said Cecilia, with her usual mournful sweetness. "I am perfectly aware of your kind intentions; but my spirits will not support farther conversation."

Poor Lodelli was now silenced; and Cecilia, leaning her aching head against the side of the carriage, resigned herself to the perplexing and melancholy reflections which the singular intelligence of her attendant had given rise to.

Every circumstance tended to confirm her belief that Angelo Guicciardini was her father; and although her knowledge of this frightful fact could not aid her in

the elucidation of any of the inexplicable mysteries that had hitherto surrounded her, yet it suggested to her some ideas that added increased unhappiness and confusion to her mind. The words which Angelo had been said to have used, when conversing at midnight with her mother, the distressed Cecilia imagined to bear an inference of the most degrading nature; for she fancied that those words could allude only to herself and Orazio, and intimated a design, on the part of his erring parent, to ensnare this young man into an union with herself, in case he succeeded in the recovery of his birth-rights. To the pure and artless mind of such a being as Cecilia could this supposition fail to impart the most acute anguish? No; her mental sufferings were excruciating; but they were not now betrayed by any violent expression of her emotions. A deep and indelible grief had already seized her heart; and while she imagined she was bending with sorrowful submission to the will of heaven, she was, in fact, yielding to that silent and desponding hopelessness that the conviction of irremediable evil but too often creates in minds possessed of too much sensibility and feeling.

To the meeting between herself and the man whom she dreaded to designate by the endearing and revered title of parent, she looked forward with sentiments of intense anxiety and dread; and the only gleam of consolation which supported her in the

frightful anticipation of such an interview resulted from the faint hope that he might be prevailed upon to permit her mother and herself to retire into a convent, where, for ever secluded from the world, their disgrace and sorrows might remain unknown and unsuspected. That Angelo either had, or speedily would effect the release of the signora from those into whose power she had been forced, Cecilia did not now doubt; and while, with all the filial tenderness of her nature, she pined to behold that dear parent, to be clasped to her maternal bosom, and to receive her valued blessing, she yet trembled at the distracting thought that she might now behold her only as the wife of the robber Angelo, and be compelled to hear the soul-harrowing confession of the existence of that ever to be lamented connexion, which had doomed her mother and herself to infamy and misery.

With a mind thus painfully pre-occupied, Cecilia observed not either the lapse of time, or the course of her journey. Unconsciously her eyes were some time vacantly fixed on the varying prospects around her, but they engaged not long her attention, nor excited in her mind one emotion of interest or pleasure. The awful sublimity of the lofty Alps, whose snowy summits, half veiled by clouds, and partially receiving a thousand varied lights and shades from the effect of the sun-beams falling on the irregular masses of ice and

craggy rocks; the dark thick forests which clothe the lower eminences, or the luxuriant cultivation that marks their base, were now regarded by Cecilia with mere indifference; nor did she perceive that the road she was travelling still continued to wind along the side of a wild and heathy mountain, where no trace of human habitation was visible, till, in the mid-day heat, the carriage stopped at the wretched remains of a goatherd's miserable temporary hut, where two men, with a fresh supply of mules, were evidently waiting their arrival.

The leader of her singular guards here enquired whether she chose to alight and take some refreshment.

To this implied offer of permission so to do she gave an assent, and was conducted, with her attendant, into the most convenient part of the hut, where a very comfortable repast of cold light viands, dried fruits, and wine, was quickly served on some of the grass-grown fragments of the little building, and she was left alone with Lodelli to the enjoyment of the little meal; of which, however, she had scarcely appetite or inclination to partake, while, with sad and trembling heart, she soon heard the loud laughs and boisterous voices of the men without, as they all sat about the entrance of the hut, regaling themselves with the provisions and wine which they had so amply provided for the journey. All the affected solemnity, which it was now evident they had had the precaution

to assume on the commencement of this strange expedition, seemed now to be wholly laid aside. The idea that should they become more unrestrained, and yield themselves up to the maddening influences of intoxication, the situation of herself and Lodelli, amid such a set of lawless ruffians, would be perilous beyond conception, filled the mind of Cecilia with so much agonizing horror, that could she have perceived the slightest hope of escaping from their power, she would have made the attempt. But alas ! this was impossible; the hut had but one entrance, and although it was almost entirely unroofed, it would be utterly impracticable to escape, as certain detection must follow any effort of the kind, and would probably subject both herself and her attendant to all the insolent threats and sneers of the incensed band, whose measures to deprive her of every opportunity of escaping from them, she justly perceived had been too well concerted to suffer her to hope that she could lull or elude their vigilance. This, indeed, was sufficiently proved by the circumstance of their being so well provided with a plentiful store of provisions, and by their care in travelling so lonely and desolate a road.

To avoid provoking her guards to either insolence or outrage, Cecilia, of course, knew would be her best means of obtaining security through the journey, and while she mentally implored heaven to protect

and preserve her from the new evils that she now dreaded, she endeavoured to reconcile herself to the present, and to look forward with hope to the future.

Meanwhile Lodelli, whose chearful disposition was unbroken by those keen sensibilities which add a thousand stings to affliction in superior minds, ate heartily, and rather augured good than evil from the loud merriment of their guards; and indeed her presentiments seemed verified, when, after a delay of nearly two hours, two of the men entered, and very respectfully informed Cecilia that the carriage was now ready for her to pursue her journey.

As Cecilia and Lodelli proceeded to enter the vehicle, they could not avoid perceiving that their guards seemed rather elevated by their recent regale; but as they waited at a distance, and did not appear inclined to infringe those rules of propriety which Cecilia wished they should observe, there existed no farther cause of uneasiness on this occasion.

For the remainder of the day they continued to travel without resting at any other place. At a late hour in the evening, however, they arrived at a little obscure hamlet, situated at the foot of wild and Alpine heights; and in this lonely, and scarcely inhabited spot, Cecilia and her attendant were permitted to take a few hours repose in a rude cottage, which afforded only a bed of rushes for their accommodation; and the owners of which appeared

to be even more wild and savage than the animals which it was their occupation to chace.

At dawn the wearying journey was again pursued. This day was passed nearly as the former, in travelling through dreary and uncultivated regions, where no signs of habitation relieved the eye, or communicated hope to the heart, and where the cold northern blast began to chill the delicate frame of Cecilia; and made Lodelli unceasingly bewail the glowing warmth of the more southerly climate, which they had been compelled to leave.

While Lodelli, half laughing, half crying, alternately ridiculed and lamented every little evil, inconvenience, and distress they met with on their way, the aching heart of Cecilia was still filled with all those regrets, sorrows, and fearful anticipations, which were, alas! not to be wholly subdued by the influence of the best religious principles, and in this state she remained that entire day.

The sun had long been set, and the darkening mists of night were fast shadowing the lonely vales and gigantic mountains, when Cecilia was informed by the man, whom she had hitherto justly supposed to be the leader of her guards, that on the following evening they should arrive at the place of their destination; but as they should first be necessitated to stop at an inn for the purpose of dismissing the car-

riage, and to procure mules to carry them through the unfrequented and dangerous parts of the mountains, he had thought it but right to remind her that the least attempt to regain her liberty, by making any appeal to the people of the inn, would be attended with the worst consequences to herself; as they could not assist her, and, by any interference that they might presume to make, would inevitably be the ruin of themselves.

Cecilia, who had little difficulty in believing that should she endeavour to interest the people alluded to in her behalf, she might only draw upon them the vengeance of Angelo Guicciardini, hesitated not to promise that she would be silent; and in an hour afterwards they arrived safely at the place alluded to.

It was a lone and desolate house, situated but a few paces from the road, in a deep and melancholy glen, through which a wide river took its mournful course, the flowing waters of which now reflected the pale beam of a crescent moon, as it declined over the western summits of the steep and inaccessible cliffs that on all sides encompassed the glen.

The miserable appearance of the interior of this sad dwelling, the squalid and meagre looks of the wretched host and hostess, as, with the vacant stare of stupid indifference, they eyed Cecilia, and mechanically obeyed the vociferated orders of the men who attended her, formed such

a disgusting scene of abject misery, that the alarmed girl shrunk in involuntary dismay from the sickening view of so much wretchedness and apparent vice, and would scarcely believe that this dreary and nearly unfurnished mansion was intended for the accommodation of travellers.

Tremblingly, she was conducted with Lodelli into a small dilapidated room within one of much larger dimensions, by Masseron, the name of the leader, who now informed her that it would be necessary she should remain there till the dawn, as no boat could be procured to take them over the river at the dark hour of night.

Cecilia with some surprise, heard that they must cross this river in their route, and would have enquired the name of it; but the few enquiries relative to what parts of the country they were travelling which she had hitherto ventured to make of this man, had invariably been checked by a rather sullen evasion, and she now feared to irritate him by further questions; she therefore listened in silence, and without replying.

The man, apparently pleased with her tacit submission, then proceeded to say, that he should immediately send in some refreshments, and, apologizing for the badness of her accommodation, withdrew.

The accommodations did indeed require apology. Cecilia shuddered as she cast her eyes around, and, by the dim red smoky glare of the lamp, beheld only bare

discoloured walls, a few broken benches, a large wide, ruinous fire-place, which seemed not to have been warmed by the faggot's blaze for a long lapse of years,—an old oak table, and one solitary antique chair, the high-stuffed back of which was so torn and demolished, that it was impossible to guess what had been its original colour. However, many minutes had not passed ere the haggard hostess entered with a load of wood, and, without noticing her lovely guest, soon kindled a chearing fire, In a few moments more, the refreshments, promised by Masseron, were brought in by himself and one of his men; and it was evident, from the nature and freshness of the repast, that Cecilia had not been an unexpected guest. Coffee, milk, white bread, and some excellent fruits and wine, proved that provision had been made against her arrival; but this was not all:—a rich velvet cloak lined with fur, a corresponding cap, for herself, and similar articles, made of less valuable materials, for Lodelli, evinced that the scheme of carrying her and her attendant off, had been a plan long concerted and provided for.

"These garments will be found very comfortable, signora, on the cold mountain tops to-morrow, I can promise you," said Masseron, addressing Cecilia, as he gave them to the care of Lodelli. "Besides, they will keep you warm to-night, as you cannot have a bed. But don't let that

fret you, for you will be happy and quiet enough by this time to-morrow night, I'll dare swear."

There was nothing in these words to excite alarm, and yet the significance with which they were spoken,—the dark, lowering, and yet arch look that accompanied them, suggested to the depressed mind of Cecilia the most wild and fearful ideas. She fancied she read the malicious scowling smile of the assassin in the hollow eye of Masseron, and without considering that were she really in the power of Angelo Guicciardini's men, she had small personal danger to dread, she almost yielded herself up a prey to all the terrific representations of her disturbed imagination, and passed the night in a state of the most agonizing suspense and apprehension, while her faithful Lodelli, resolutely refusing to attempt to close her eyes in transient forgetfulness, in vain sought to chear the mournful hours by endeavouring to draw the attention of her lady to the little tales and fables which she silenced her own fears in order to relate, for the amusement of the former, who, however, was far more inclined to listen to the faintly-heard peals of riotous mirth that occasionally proceeded from a distant room where her guards were assembled, than to the well-meant efforts of Lodelli.

At length, after a night of extreme agitation and misery, Cecilia and her at-

tendant were called to embark in the boat which was to convey them across the river.

It was hardly light when Masseron conducted them to the boat; but Cecilia soon perceived that himself and another of the men were the only persons who entered the boat with her and Lodelli.

Silent and dejected, she spoke not, however, till they reached the opposite shore, and then, perceiving four mules in readiness, she timidly enquired whether the rest of her guards had been dismissed?

Masseron, without replying to her question, spoke to the man who was in waiting with the mules, and having taken them from his charge, and sent him away, he now assisted his lovely prisoner and her attendant to mount the mules intended for them, and informed Cecilia that his companions had been dismissed, as there was no further need for their services; adding, that there was no danger of meeting with any opponents amid the unfrequented passes they were that day to travel. He then ordered the man who accompanied him, and whom Cecilia now perceived was to act as a guide, to lead the way, and to be careful by what paths he should take them.

The little cavalcade now set forward, and began to ascend the rugged eminences that towered above the river. These steep acclivities, thickly wooded with dwarf oak and various wild evergreens, admitted no prospect amidst their devious windings, and the heavy, entangled branches, that

extended across the path, not unfrequently impeded the progress of the travellers, and obliged the men to dismount to remove these unwelcome obstacles to their course. As they ascended higher, however, the scene became barren and dreary in the extreme. Masses of rock piled on rock, whose rude and pointed summits pierced the clouds, soon surrounded the travellers on every side, and no trace of vegetation, save the few stunted shrubs thinly scattered amid the broken cliffs, relieved the melancholy sterility of the scene.

After a few hours painful journeying through these desert heights, they suddenly entered a deep and narrow defile, the almost precipitous descent of which caused Masseron to pause, ere he would venture himself, or suffer the females to proceed down it. A volley of execrations were now poured on his companion, and as roughly answered; the one swearing at the other for leading them by such a way, and the other as loudly insisting that there was no danger to be dreaded; and that it was the best and most unfrequented path with which he was acquainted.

At length, to the infinite relief of Cecilia, who had momentarily expected that the men would extend their quarrel to personal attacks, Masseron sullenly prepared to descend the defile, and having carefully taken hold of the bridle of the mule which bore Cecilia, cautiously led the animal along.

In less than a quarter of an hour the

party safely arrived at the bottom of this dangerous pass, and were well rewarded for their temerity and perseverance by entering a little secluded dell, open to the southern sun-beams, and watered by innumerable rivulets that flowed from the rocks above, and which, here fertilising the ground, gave beauty and verdure to the scene. The myrtle, the laurestinus, and the flowering ash, here bloomed in rich luxuriance; and multitudes of various wild flowers were profusely scattered over the verdant grassy carpet that stretched along the banks of the fairy streamlets, to which they owed their existence.

Masseron could not forbear a shout of pleasure as they entered the shady recesses of this charming dell; and even Cecilia forgot for a moment her cares in the contemplation of the unexpected and delightful scene; while their guide, now retorting all the reproaches of Masseron in a tone of whimsical irony and exultation, proposed their pausing to rest the mules, and take some refreshment; adding, that no other spot, for the whole remainder of the journey, would be found so pleasant, or so suitable for that purpose.

Masseron, who needed little entreaties on this occasion, readily assented, and the little party now dismounted.

That share of the repast allotted to Cecilia and Lodelli was again spread at a distance from the men, and every possible attention paid to the wishes of the former.

After a delay of two or three hours, the travellers again set forward. The way now lay along a narrow valley between two immense chains of rocks, and at length terminated at the foot of a steep and rough ascent, which, winding for miles up a mountain eminence, gradually disclosed to view the bold and Alpine heights, which on all sides reared their lofty heads in shapes majestic, varied, and impressive—some almost clothed to their highest summits with dark and ancient forests that seemed the dread abodes of wild and savage beasts of prey—others towering in bare and pointed cliffs, amidst whose rifted chasms, and distorted, rugged crags, the wild ,impetuous mountain-torrents foaming in many a scattered cataract, appeared to speak the awfully convulsive wrecks of nature; while, from the heath-covered sides and brows of other elevated heights, the dewy air of evening received refreshing odours from unnumbered balmy herbs and fragrant wild-flowers.

The aspect of solitary grandeur—the impressive sublimity which characterised the scenery by which she was now surrounded, insensibly captivated the attention of Cecilia, who, as her mule mechanically retraced the steps of that of the guide, marked the softened tints of the sun's declining rays fade from the horizon beyond the western summits of the mountains; and the pale, clear beam of the early moon diffuse over the scene that silvery hue of light which, reflected on the

white mists of the valley, gives to the eye of pensive Fancy the illusion of a distant ocean.

As they ascended higher up the steep acclivities, new images of nature's wild sublimities broke on the view: mountains piled on mountains, in dark and awful irregularity, extended far as the reach of vision; and, lost in snowy glaciers, mingled with the skies.

For above three hours Cecilia and her companion continued to follow their conductors, who observed a profound silence, till the faint sound of a distant bell was heard chiming the hour of the night.

"That is the bell of the little convent of San Francisco," suddenly observed the guide, and was instantly rebuked by Masseron, who desired him to mind his business, and not waste the time in idle remarks.

The man muttered a grumbling and undistinguishable reply, and increased his speed. Another hour of silence and weary toiling up the rugged pathway of the mountain succeeded. At length they entered a narrow, grass-grown road that led by a gradual descent into a valley, almost environed by frowning masses of rocks.

The moon, which was now nearly setting, gave not one friendly ray of light to guide the travellers through the dark windings of this mournful glen, where no sound, save the rising wind sighing amongst the drooping foliage of the shrubs and weeds that hung from the tall rocks which over-arched the path, interrupted

the desolate silence which usually distinguished this melancholy pass.

As they continued to advance, the guide repeatedly advised caution; and Masseron, once more seizing the bridle of Cecilia's mule, led on the tired beast till a sudden cry from the guide caused them to halt.

"What danger?" vociferated Masseron.

"O, nothing! only I have got a confounded fall at the foot of the old cross." And here he uttered an execration against those who had erected it so near the edge of the path; while the enraged Masseron inveighed against his cowardice.

"Hold your vaunting abuse," retorted the other; "you would be as bad as myself if you thought you saw her looking just as she did before she died—so beautiful and so woeful. By Saint Pietro I swear I never shall forget that night; and though I never passed this old cross since that time, I verily think I——"

"Bah! bah! hast thou lost thy senses, dolt?" loudly exclaimed Masseron. "Proceed, and have done with thy fool's gabble."

"Fool's gabble! I wish it was fool's gabble; but if you trembled and quaked at night sometimes as——"

"Go on, go on," now roared the still more enraged Masseron; a command which the guide thought proper to obey with all possible alacrity, and proceeded in as quick a pace as the deep obscurity which over-

shadowed the valley would allow him to use.

Descending still lower into the dreary recesses of this gloomy hollow, Masseron continued to lead the mule of Cecilia, who had been so much shocked by the mysterious and frightful expressions which had escaped from the guide in the recent dispute, that she had scarcely strength or power to retain her seat; while Lodelli, keeping close to her lady's side, evinced, by her half-smothered sobs and sighs, that she also had not been an unterrified listener to the alarming words of their guide. Neither Cecilia nor Lodelli, however, ventured to make a single enquiry on the subject, and for some time longer a mute silence prevailed.

In about half an hour the guide softly cried, "Halt!" and the whole party paused.

"Are we near the arch?" roughly asked Masseron.

"Yes," replied the other: "shall I strike a light, and kindle the torches?" as he dismounted from his mule.

"Ay, certainly," returned Masseron; and the guide immediately did so.

Both the men now dismounted; and Masseron, approaching Cecilia, informed her they were now at the end of the journey, and proceeded to lift her off her mule, while the guide, waving the torch high in the air, revealed the dark outline of an immense archway, shadowed by tall and

ancient trees. Every other surrounding object was still concealed in sombre darkness. The chilling thrill of fear and despondency struck on the heart of Cecilia, as her anxious eyes momentarily glanced towards the arch, and while mentally she exclaimed—"Gracious power! is this the terrific abode of my father?" she had nearly fainted.

"You will have only a few paces to proceed under the arch, lady," said Masseron: "you had better accept my arm for your support while we pass through and ascend the steps, for they are more rough and broken than even the ground under the arch."

"Steps! What are there steps leading into these horrid, black looking caves?" tremblingly exclaimed Lodelli, while she advanced to support her lady.

"You have no occasion to ask questions when you will see all in a minute or two, Dame Curious," said Masseron, half laughing; and Lodelli, afraid of saying any thing more, attended to Cecilia.

"Mercy on me! how the old arch is worn since I was here last," observed the guide, waving the torch around, and discovering the humid walls broken and decayed.

"Peace!" cried Masseron: "we are at the steps."

Cecilia, now nearly exhausted by fatigue and the violence of her feelings, was assisted to ascend innumerable time-worn

steps cut in the rock; and which, at length, terminated in a large area surrounded by tall trees, whose heavy branches, bending to every gust of wind, waved mournfully on high, and added a dread solemnity to the place and hour. In every hollow moaning blast, the affrighted fancy of Cecilia distinguished only the cries of murder, or the groans of the plundered traveller. The idea that possibly a few minutes more would introduce her into the presence of that lawless chief whom, with increasing horror, she believed to be her father, froze her heart, and, with a sigh of deep despair, she sunk senseless into the arms of Lodelli.

CHAP. VIII.

No adequate idea can be formed of the sensations of Cecilia when, on re opening her eyes, she perceived that she was reclined on a couch in a spacious, lofty room, well furnished in an ancient style, and better illumed by the bright, chearing blaze of a large wood fire than by the lamp that burned on a table near her.

The sound of Lodelli's voice alone convinced the amazed Cecilia that all she beheld was reality. She was, however, too much struck by the unexpected singularity of her situation to be capable of making any immediate enquiry on the subject;

but as her eyes most eloquently demanded an explanation, Lodelli immediately began to give one.

"Oh, my dear signora!—my dear young lady!" rapidly uttered the latter, "ah! you may well gaze about you so surprised; for I'm sure you never could expect, after waking out of that terrible fit, to find yourself in such a warm, comfortable room as this, and in such a fine, ancient castle too. But now, signora, you see, as I often told you, that strange things do happen sometimes, people don't know how. O dear! O dear! who would ever have thought that such good luck would befal us, just when we thought we were at the mouth of a robber's cave.—— But as I said——"

"For mercy's sake, end my suspense, and say where we are," faintly exclaimed Cecilia, interrupting the loquacity of her attendant, while her eyes still continued to wander on the surrounding objects.

"Where are we, signora?"---

"If you mean what is the name of the place, or of the owner, that's more than I can tell you; but, I suppose, Masseron will let you know when you are able to talk to him; for he brought us here you know, signora."

Cecilia, who in the first hurry of her thoughts, had conjectured that both herself and Lodelli had been rescued from the hands of Masseron, and had been

cnoveyed by her deliverers to some dwelling belonging to them, received this information with emotions of new surprise; but before she could make any further enquiries or observations, an elderly female hastily entered the apartment, and was advancing towards the couch, till suddenly perceiving that the lovely girl had recovered from her swoon, she respectfully paused. The soft and sweet voice of Cecilia, who now attempted to rise, and entreated her to approach, induced the woman to come forward, who now, with a low curtsey, begged to know if she was somewhat better.

Cecilia replied in the affirmative; and then enquired to whom the castle belonged.

The old woman hesitated for a moment, and then, with a confused look, replied, "To a noble signor, lady, who no doubt has a very great concern and affection for you."

"But his name?" cried the still more amazed Cecilia.

"He will tell you that himself, signora, I believe," hastily returned the old woman; and then adding, "but as you seem to be so much recovered, signora, I will send up some supper, if you please," and with another curtsey she hurried out of the room.

"There, signora, there!" exclaimed Lodelli, "you see its no use to ask any questions about the matter till you talk with Masseron; who, however, answered

me surlily enough when, as he was carrying you across the court, I asked him to whom the castle belonged. There are two things pretty sure, however, and those are, that the owner of this fine castle can't be the Signor Angelo Guicciardini, because great rob—— that is, those who follow such business mostly live in caves, and I'm sure it don't belong to that frightful Count de Weilburgh, or we should not be so well taken care of and be treated with so much respect."

Cecilia could not avoid mentally allowing that Lodelli's simple remarks were rather judicious. It was certainly highly improbable that the castle belonged to Angelo Guicciardini; nor did it appear reasonable that were its real possessor the Count de Weilburgh, she should receive so much attention to her care and accommodation from one who might prove to be an enraged relative, and who had evidently treated her mother with so much cruelty. In this moment of suspensive doubt and distress, the chief unhappiness of the amiable Cecilia was occasioned by the afflicting idea that she had now perhaps lost every possible opportunity of hearing any tidings of her mother. It was true, she had looked forward to a meeting with Angelo Guicciardini with unconquerable emotions of grief and horror; but when she had considered that from him she might learn some intelligence of that dear parent, even should she be disappointed in the anxious-

ly-indulged hope of seeing her, she had become resigned to the fate which had thrown her into the hands of the men, who, she imagined, belonged to him; and had been consoled by the idea that the united prayers and tears of her mother and herself, might induce him to abandon his dreadful occupation. Under such circumstances she could not but regard her disappointment as unfortunate as extraordinary; and almost unable to endure the torturing suspense that every moment increased in her mind, she waited in the utmost impatience the re-appearance of the ancient female domestic with the promised supper.

While Cecilia silently suffered this state of keen anxiety, Lodelli employed herself in examining the apartment, and in expatiating on the comforts of a large, antique bed, which stood in the furthest extremity, the dark hangings of which had as yet concealed it from the view of Cecilia, who was now too much occupied by her own perplexing thoughts to be capable of paying any attention to the unceasing loquacity of her attendant.

The entrance of the person whom she so anxiously expected at length gave some relief to her mind; but as she was almost immediately followed by a coarse, peasant-looking girl, who now assisted in bringing in the refreshments, Cecilia hesitated to address to the old woman the enquiries that she had just determined to renew.

The simple, rustic stare of curiosity with which the girl, on her first entering the room, gazed upon Cecilia, was, however, speedily exchanged for the look of half-stupid attention, with which she received the commands of Dame Ursulina, so was the old woman called; and the moment the supper was arranged on a table near the fire, the girl was dismissed by the superior domestic, who then, with a low curtsey, formally begged to know whether Cecilia had any further commands.

"None, but that you will inform me who is the owner of this castle: or at least acquaint the man who brought me here that I wish to see him."

Ursulina silently dropped another formal curtsey, and immediately retired, leaving Cecilia to imagine that she was gone to execute the latter part of her wishes. In this idea, however, the artless girl was quickly undeceived by Lodelli, who exclaimed, "Well, signora, if ever I saw any thing like that in my life, that little, ugly, old witch has walked away without so much as giving you any answer.—Why, this is like being in the castle of some terrible enchanter.—I'm half afraid we shall be bewitched if we dare to touch that nice looking supper, for all it seems so good and tempting. There were such doings in former times; were there not, signora?"

Cecilia, who at any other time would have been really diverted by the strange mixture of eager appetite, and superstitious

fear, manifested in the looks of Lodelli, could even now scarcely forbear a smile, and said, "You had better take courage to make the experiment immediately, Lodelli, unless you have patience to wait till I have questioned Masseron, who, I suppose, will speedily attend me."

"La, signora!—why sure you don't think that the old woman will send him here?"

"She did not say that she could not?"—

"But she did not say that she would, signora; and I'm sure she would not have walked off so slily without saying a word, if she had intended to tell him to come," answered Lodelli.

Cecilia now looked doubly distressed. Poor Lodelli forgot the supper in a minute, and, rendered insensible to the calls of hunger by her wish of seeing her lady somewhat easy, proposed to find her way to the servants' hall, and summon Masseron herself.

Cecilia, after a short pause, rather reluctantly assented, as she feared that the young woman might mistake her way in the windings of so large a building. She would have accompanied her, but she could not think it prudent so suddenly to expose herself to the gaze of the domestics who she supposed inhabited the castle.

"Did you see many servants on our entrance into this edifice, Lodelli?"

"O dear, no, signora; not one but the old woman and the girl; but there may

be a great many more for what I know, because you were carried up to this room by Masseron the moment we got in; and so I had no opportunity of seeing any thing.—But what shall I do for a light, signora? I cannot find my way in the dark, and 'tis impossible to leave you without the lamp."

Cecilia, who every moment considered it more and more imprudent to suffer Lodelli to traverse the lonely corridors of a mansion with which she was unacquainted, now said that the morning would be early enough to seek Masseron, who she could not doubt would pass the night in the castle.

"This is all very true, signora, but how shall we eat the supper, unless we first know by whom it was provided?" observed Lodelli, in reply.

Again Cecilia almost smiled at this whimsical argument, and perceiving that it would now require more persuasion than she had spirit to exert in order to dissuade Lodelli from her wish of exploring her way to that part of the castle inhabited by the servants, she desired her to take the lamp and go.

Lodelli, after a little hesitation at the idea of leaving her lady in the dark, put some fresh billets of wood, which lay ready for the purpose, on the fire, and, as soon as they began to blaze, availed herself of Cecilia's permission to take the lamp, and ran off, promising not to make the least unnecessary delay.

For some minutes after her attendant had closed the door, Cecilia looked anxiously round the room. It was hung with tapestry representing the return of Jeptha. The meeting between his daughter and himself, and the declaration of his awful vow, were here pourtrayed with the most skilful and affecting expression: the sacred and innocent festivity with which the lovely maid, attended by her companions, goes forth to meet her valiant parent—the recoiling terror, the agony, with which that parent beholds her advancing—the attitude of mingled woe and resolution with which he reveals to her the nature of his vow—the astonishment, the awe, the duteous submission, which characterized the countenance and figure of the artless virgin, on hearing the dreadful declaration—all were so exquisitely wrought, that Cecilia had no difficulty in decyphering the story at the first glance, as the bright, extended blaze, from the large quantity of wood burning on the wide hearth fully illuminated the room. The sacrifice of a daughter was, however, a subject which she could not contemplate without the keenest emotion, and soon turning her eyes towards the fire, she gazed vacantly on the cheerful flame, while her mind was intently occupied by the quickly-varying ideas to which a retrospection of her past, and the review of her present situation, naturally gave rise. If she was not in the power of Angelo Guicciardini or the Count de Weilburgh, who

else could be the author of the well-contrived and well-executed scheme that had brought her to the castle? Cecilia did not ask herself this question twice, without suffering her suspicions to glance towards the Signor Faenza.

Confounded by this suggestion, her ideas quickly reverted to those circumstances which rendered it but too probable. The admiration which it was impossible for her not to have perceived in the looks, the words, and manner of Faenza, at the period of their first acquaintance—his evasive conduct on the night of the Marchesa di Rovenza's *fête*—his recent attack on Leonardo—and the cautions of the Father Ascollini—all alternately arose to her mind with almost the force of conviction; and thus she was plunged into new fears and new sorrows.

Every moment of Lodelli's absence now appeared an age to the impatient suspense of Cecilia; yet nearly an hour elapsed ere she heard the welcome footsteps of her attendant, who ran hastily along the passage leading to the room, and who rushed in with as much breathless rapidity as if she had been pursued.

Her looks, which were pale and full of anger, together with her hurried manner, so much affected the sorrow-weakened nerves of Cecilia, that she could scarcely articulate an enquiry as to what had alarmed or displeased her.

"I am not frightened, signora," replied

Lodelli, setting down the lamp, and casting a most wishful glance at the still untouched dainties spread on the table; "but I am vexed and mad at the foolish deceit and art of people; for I'm sure you would have been no hindrance to his plans."

"Whose plans?" faintly asked Cecilia.

"Why, the plans of the owner of this castle, signora, who, of all the birds in the air and all the fishes in the sea, is no other than—the *Marchese di Rovenza!*"

"The Marchese di Rovenza!" ejaculated Cecilia, almost breathless with astonishment.

"The Marchese di Rovenza indeed, signora; no other, I assure you; and they all thought to keep it so snug and sly too. St. Bridget was on my side, I'm sure, when I thought upon it to go down stairs just now. Oh, what a round-about race I have had on't. Do you know, signora, that before you can get to the great hall, you must pass through the——"

"Lodelli! Lodelli!" tremulously exclaimed Cecilia, impatient at her strange circumlocution.

"I beg pardon, signora; I'm very foolish, to be sure; but I will now tell you all about it very regularly. Well, signora, when I went down the passage, I got to the corridor, and from the corridor to the .... pooh! but that's no matter; I got safely to the grand hall, and that's enough: but indeed, signora mio, I was frightened when I came there. 'Tis all of black marble;

and between the pillars, far back, almost close to the wall, there are such a set of white marble statues, all looking so ghastly and ghost-like. But you may see them all yourself, signora; and so I need not say any more about *them*. Well, after a deal to do, I spied out a door wide open that led into a long arched passage; and as I thought I saw a glimmer of light at the bottom of it, and heard the voices of people as if they were laughing, I was sure I was in the right way to the servants' apartments. So I walked down the passage, and came to the door of a room, where I saw, through the opening, that Dame Ursulina, I think the girl called her Dame Ursulina, sitting by the fire with Masseron. Now, if I had not heard your name mentioned, signora, I would have gone plump in; but when I heard them talking at a great rate about my lady, it was no wonder that I stopped to hear a little before I shewed myself; for, says I to my myself, may be Masseron won't tell my lady what he's telling this old dame; and so, as we must not be too nice in such a case, I thought I would not miss the opportunity of hearing all I could. Now, signora," continued Lodelli, after a short pause, during which Cecilia regarded her with a look of most eager solicitude, "I can't pretend to recollect every word that passed, because Dame Ursulina was making her remarks on what Masseron told her; and she spoke so slowly and so solemn, that it was quite tiresome

to hear her; and one forgets one thing before she has taken time enough to speak the other. But I recollect what Masseron said very well; and so I suppose that will do:—'But don't you know who she is?' drawled out the dame in the most wearisome tone. 'I don't know rightly,' answered Masseron; 'but it seemed that his excellenza was sorely afraid that she would quite steal away the signora his daughter's lover; and so he has sent her out of the way till they are married. The young signor, his intended son-in-law, is a right noble-looking youth. I never saw but one man who could be compared to him, and that was the young Count di Udina, whose mad pranks brought both himself and all his family to destruction.'—I suppose, signora, that count that Masseron spoke of must be a very *wicked, handsome* man; for Ursulina groaned at the very name of him."

Cecilia sat listening with a degree of intense earnestness, which prevented her replying. Lodelli continued: "Well, signora, you may be sure that when I heard that you had been sent out of the way, that you might not hinder some folks from being married, I was ten times more curious than ever; and, oh! how my heart did beat when Masseron went on saying, 'The Marchesa di Rovenza'—yes, it was Rovenza—'The Marchesa di Rovenza was very fond of the girl, and wanted to send her into a convent; so the marchese seemed to

consent, and every thing was prepared for the journey; but, by St. Mark, he was too cunning ever to let the beautiful little witch'—yes, signora, Masseron called you a *witch!* I could have torn his eyes out for it, although he did say you was a *beautiful* one; but, after all, it was only on account of your beauty; for he said afterwards that——"

"Be explicit, I intreat," interrupted Cecilia, effectually wearied and harrassed by the circumlocution of poor Lodelli, who, now promising not to deviate from her story for the future, again proceeded:

"Where did I leave off, signora?—oh! at the *witch*—'The marchese was too cunning ever to let the beautiful little witch reach the holy cage in which his lady wanted to coop her up; for he had sense enough to know, that if the young spark knew where she was, he might not be so tractable as he ought to be, and the Signora Ottavania would go mad with love; though by the by,' said Masseron, 'it is but a queer match, for he is but a poor bit of a Swiss officer, with little more than his person and his sword to boast of.' And isn't it very odd, signora, that the marchese should like his daughter to be married to the Signor Orazio? for I'm sure that the Swiss officer can be no other than he."

This intelligence so entirely overpowered the spirits of Cecilia, that she now sat pale and inanimate as a statue. For the first time she experienced the full force of those

tender sentiments which, notwithstanding all her efforts to subdue them, she involuntarily entertained for Orazio; and to learn that she had been purposely exiled to the closest concealment, in order that she might prove no impediment to his union with the haughty, insolent Ottavania, was a shock such as she had not either strength or fortitude to support. Happily, however, the affectionate assiduities of her faithful attendant were successfully employed in restoring her to sensibility; for Lodelli no sooner perceived the almost death-like inanimation which had seized her lady than she snatched up a flask of wine, and forced Cecilia to swallow a small glass-ful. The renovating warmth communicated to her chilled frame by the wine, which was of a quality much more powerful than any she had ever tasted, restored her to perception, and to all the agonizing pangs of feeling contending with reason; for while with the deepest emotion she now wept the sad certainty that she must indeed no more suffer her thoughts to dwell, even for a moment, on one who was the destined husband of another, she yet began to excuse the duplicity of which the marchese had been guilty towards herself: as she justly imagined that any other nobleman would have acted nearly in the same manner, had he had occasion to fear that the heir of an illustrious house could be so far influenced by his passion, as to devote

a moment's thought to the daughter of a bandit outcast.

While these heart-rending reflections rapidly crowded on the mind of Cecilia, and while in silent anguish her tears flowed fast at the retrospection of her sad destiny, poor Lodelli inveighed most bitterly against the marchese and all his family, not omitting to include Orazio himself in her angry invectives.

"A young hypocrite!" she passionately exclaimed; "I believe he's no better than what Father Ascollini said he was at first when he came to our happy cottage, or else he never would have falsified all the fine speeches that he made to you, signora, the last night that we were at the Villa di Rovenza. A deceitful creature! to vow that life and riches, and I don't know what else beside, would be no comfort to him without you; and now to intend to marry that great, tall, cavalier-looking Signora Ottavania, with all her pride and her spite. O! she will plague him finely, that's one comfort; she'll make him repent his false-hearted ways all the days of his life, I'll warrant me. And there's that cruel, foolish old marchese too, that was so busy in sending you, signora mio, out of the way, to heaven knows where, I'll vow that his own son will not thank him for his pains; for, I am sure, the Signor Leonardo adores the very sight of you. Ah, signora! if you was to know all the questions that Conradine, the Sig-

nor Rovenza's valet, used to ask me about you, and how he often said that his master thought you handsomer than all the ladies in Venice, you would then think the Signor Leonardo worth twenty such lovers as the Signor Orazio, who is no more worth fretting about than an old shoe. Besides, I would have the Signor di Rovenza if it was only to vex the old marchese, for the illnatured, sly trick he has played in sending you to this great, dismal castle, where we are to be shut up, I suppose, as if we were in a prison, and then——"

"Hush, my good Lodelli," now interrupted Cecilia, who had been brought to a full sense of the weakness and impropriety of yielding to the excess of her emotions in the presence of her well-meaning but imprudent attendant, who, she perceived, by the conclusion of her speech, attributed the tears which she shed solely to Orazio's account.

"Hush, my good Lodelli, and remember that my obligations to the Marchese and Marchesa di Rovenza must ever claim my most fervent gratitude; nor shall I regret my temporary residence here, if that circumstance can in the slightest manner contribute to their happiness."

"Ah, signora! that's just like yourself; you never mind an evil turn from those who have once done you a good one; and so if you are content to stay here awhile, I'm sure I can have no cause to complain; and, indeed, to tell the truth, signora, I

don't think we shall be very badly treated here; for I heard Masseron tell Dame Ursulina that the marchese had given the strictest orders to him to behave to you with the greatest respect, and to let you have every thing that you should want on the journey; and that he had made Fabricio give him a great purse full of sequins to get you whatever you might wish for on the way. And then he laughed and said how merrily they had all lived as we were travelling to the castle, and told how I had taken him and his companions for inquisitors, at which Ursulina did laugh most heartily; though after all, signora, it came out that the men were dressed in that odd way by the direction of the marchese, who told them that you would take them for other people than what they were in reality, and would then go quietly along with them. There was art, signora."

Cecilia perfectly coincided in Lodelli's opinion of the art and management of the marchese, who, she could not doubt, had intended to delude her into the idea that the men he had employed on this occasion belonged to Angelo Guicciardini; but as she did not deem it prudent to make any particular observations on the subject, she remained silent, and Lodelli continued:—

"Well, signora, while Masseron and Ursulina were merrily enjoying the thought of my fright when I fancied that the men were inquisitors: I stood still

listening at the door, till all of a sudden I saw the man who guided us up among the mountains to the castle, coming down the passage with the girl who came up to your room with the supper, and then I was quite afraid of being caught a listening, so I slipt into a little niche in the wall that I luckily spied out, but as I thought that they might happen to see me as they passed by, for the man had a light in his hand, I bethought me of playing them a comical trick, and so just as they came near, I gave a heavy groan, and bounded out of the niche, dashed the candle out of the man's hand, and brushed past him as quick as lightening, and then ran off to tell you, signora, all I had heard."

"Certainly these people must have known you, Lodelli;" observed Cecilia, rather uneasy at the idea that the unguarded conduct of her attendant would give Ursulina a plea for rendering the situation of Lodelli rather uncomfortable: "your own light must undoubtedly have revealed your figure to them."

"No, no, signora, there was no danger of that, for no sooner had I discovered the right passage leading to the servants' room, than I ran back across the hall, and hid my lamp behind the door belonging to the room near the foot of the grand staircase, where I found it quite safe to my hand as I came back again. And I'm quite sure that neither of the frightened

fools knew who it was, for the man fell down as if he was dead, as I ran past him, and the girl screamed as if I was going to fly away with her. But, signora, won't you eat any supper?"

The opening of the room-door prevented Cecilia's reply, and Ursulina, attended by the peasant girl, again entered; the former looking so grave and so solemn, that the expression of her features was now almost petrifying, and the latter the very image of stupid terror.

CHAP. IX.

CECILIA, who imagined that Ursulina was come to make some complaints of Lodelli's recent exploit, was preparing to excuse her conduct as well as she possibly could, when the old woman undeceived her as to the purpose of her visit, by tremulously requesting to know whether she should as yet shew Lodelli the room where she was to sleep.

"I am to be near my lady, an't I?" exclaimed Lodelli.

Ursulina stared, but gravely replied—"Your room is at the other side of the building: there are no servants' chambers in this wing. But if it is more agreeable to the signora that you should remain in her apartment to-night, as the strangeness of

the place may make it seem lonely to her, I will to-morrow try if I can't suit her convenience by accommodating you with a room on this corridor."

Cecilia, who was extremely gratified by this ready attention to her wishes, expressed her approbation of Dame Ursulina's proposal, and then enquired when she could see Masseron.

He would attend her commands in the morning was the reply, and after an enquiry whether the signora found her own accommodation agreeable to her wishes, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, Ursulina made a formal curtsey and withdrew.

The moment she was gone, the lively Lodelli began to exult in the certainty that the trick she had played had not been found out, averring that had it been otherwise Ursulina would have spoken of it.

"But her silence has convinced me of one thing, however, signora," added this voluble being, "and that is, that the castle is surely haunted, for if there was not a ghost in it they would not so soon have taken me for one; which I'm certain they did, because they both looked so frightened."

Cecilia, faintly smiling at this sagacious observation, endeavoured to dissipate these rising superstitious fears expressed by her simple attendant, who, she well knew, if once possessed with the idea of a supernatural inhabitant of the castle, would be

wholly incapable of rational attention to any other subject—a circumstance which would prove most disagreeable and unfortunate in the present situation of her affairs. At length the thoughts of Lodelli wandered from the ghost to the supper, and as Cecilia now thought proper to partake slightly of the repast, she soon had the satisfaction of perceiving her attendant lose all remains of her superstitious alarms in the comforts of a plentiful meal; and which was followed by some hours calm and refreshing repose to both, the extreme fatigue and anxiety which Cecilia had undergone for some days having at length entirely exhausted her strength, and the vexations of Lodelli seldom depriving her of sleep.

The latter, however, was the first who awoke, but not till a late hour of the morning, and perceiving her lady still enjoying a temporary relief from her sorrows, this faithfully attached servant sat silently watching the slumbers of Cecilia, and thanking heaven as she viewed the soft expression of serene unconsciousness which now marked her innocent countenance.

From this employment, however, Lodelli was soon disturbed by the entrance of Ursulina; but the moment the latter understood that Cecilia still slept, she stole across the room with the utmost caution, and for some moments stood gazing upon the still unconscious girl with a degree of earnest scrutiny, which was even so strikingly

singular as to induce Lodelli to enquire whether she had never before seen her lady.

Ursulina, offended at a question which was a pert comment on her penetrating looks, gave an angry glance at Lodelli and immediately left the room.

At this moment Cecilia awoke, and her attendant, now enraged by the idea that Ursulina's retreating from the room had disturbed her, exclaimed in a tone of vexation:—

"Dear signora! has that witch-looking old woman wakened you at last?" and observed not that Ursulina was already returning, till the latter peevishly said:—

"If the signora, your lady, permits your tongue so many freedoms, she must expect that she may find enemies perhaps in those who would wish to prove themselves her friends."

Cecilia, although yet scarcely sensible where she was, and quite unprepared for so strange a morning's salutation, now looked reprovingly at Lodelli, who immediately drew back abashed, and Ursulina, respectfully advancing, informed her lady that she might have breakfast served either in her own room or in one of the lower apartments of the castle, as she pleased.

Cecilia, instantly availing herself of the opportunity of viewing some other parts of the edifice, which she could not forbear mentally considering as her prison, ordered

breakfast below, and Ursulina again withdrew.

While assisting her lady to dress, poor Lodelli solicitously essayed to extenuate the inadvertent expressions she had used towards the old woman, by describing the remarkable manner in which she had regarded Cecilia while sleeping—a circumstance which the latter could not avoid considering very extraordinary, as Ursulina seemed rather to have shunned looking at her on the preceding night. Cecilia did not, however, now make any particular remarks on the subject; but she seriously cautioned Lodelli not to again hazard offending Ursulina; and then retiring to her usual morning devotion, was soon after summoned by the old woman to breakfast.

Slowly following the conducting steps of Ursulina along the vaulted corridor, and down the wide marble staircase, the attention of Cecilia was soon irresistibly attracted to the observation of objects so novel to her sight as the interior of the castle presented: the dark gloom of the great hall, through the high and narrow painted windows of which even the morning sun-beam gave but a faint and sickly gleaming light, that merely served to render distinguishable the antique ornaments of strange and grotesque meaning which encumbered the gothic clustered pillars; beyond the arches of which were dimly discerned the gigantic statues formed of white stone, that had so much alarmed

Lodelli on the preceding night, and which Cecilia now viewed as equally mournful and disgusting to the eye, when contrasted with the black marble pillars and pavement of the hall.

The room into which she was conducted to breakfast, presented, however, a very different aspect; it was indeed entirely wainscoted with oak, nearly as dark and as well polished as the marble of the hall, and each particular pannel curiously carved and gilded; but the furniture was handsome, and a blazing fire, added to the neatly arranged repast of the morning, gave the apartment an air of extreme comfort.

It was impossible for Cecilia not to feel rather gratified by the evident attention to her convenient accommodation which was evinced by Ursulina; and attributing this to the directions of the Marchese di Rovenza, she derived some degree of consolation from the idea that the same generous spirit which had impelled him to endeavour to render her temporary banishment as supportable as possible, would also induce him to exert himself in such efforts as it was in his power to make for the discovery of her mother.

As these short reflections struck on the mind of Cecilia, she almost hesitated to desire Ursulina to inform Masseron that she wished to see him immediately, lest her questioning this man should be reported to the marchese, and probably irritate him

against herself; or, what she dreaded far more, might render him less lenient towards Angelo Guicciardini, than he would possibly feel inclined to be in case of her submission to his strangely assumed authority over her person and liberty.

This irresolution was, however, quickly ended by Ursulina's informing her that Masseron had been obliged to depart on his return from the castle before sun-rise. "I told him, signora, that you were extremely desirous of seeing him, but I could not persuade him to delay; for he said that his orders were not to answer any questions you might propose to him, and, as it was his duty to obey his employers, he durst not venture to do otherwise."

Surprised, disappointed and distressed, Cecilia sat silent and unhappy. She knew not how to act in this dilemma, for although she ardently wished to make some enquiries of the old woman, yet she dreaded the consequences of attempting to penetrate the strange system of reserve that the marchese had thought proper to adopt on the present occasion. Her evident uneasiness and perplexity appeared to affect Ursulina, whose usually contracted features now relaxed into an expression of gentleness and compassion, and who, after a momentary pause, continued:—"If I might presume to advise you, young lady, I would recommend you to exert your patience for a little while, and to try to make yourself as easy as you can till your

doubts are ended, which, I dare say, will happen very soon. And, in the mean time, you may be certain that you will receive here every proper attention and respect; and have nothing to complain of but your want of liberty:—not that you will be very much confined neither; for you may ramble through every part of the castle, if you please to do so; and I can assure you, signora, that it is well worth the trouble of walking about to see all the ancient curiosities this vast fabric contains. Shall I send the keys after breakfast, young lady?"

Although by no means very well inclined to pass the morning in a survey of the castle, yet Cecilia did not deem it prudent to reject the offer of liberty to range through the spacious edifice, and therefore, after thanking Ursulina, said, she would avail herself of the indulgence.

The old woman now looked surprised and pleased at an acquiescence which she believed to be the effect of beginning resignation, and then said she would send the keys immediately.

"How many domestics reside here?" timidly asked Cecilia.

"Myself, and the girl whom you saw last night, signora, are at present the only domestics in the castle. I lived here for some time entirely alone, but some how the place is grown so dismal lately, that I was glad to beg for a companion. But you had better take your breakfast, sig-

nora; your coffee is very good, I can assure you; and, if you please, I will take care of your attendant, if you will permit her to follow me to my apartment."

Cecilia immediately intimated to Lodelli her desire that she should accompany Ursulina.

Thus left to solitude and her own distressing reflections, Cecilia suffered the morning repast to remain untasted, till the return of Lodelli recalled her to a consciousness of the weakness she was guilty of in indulging a train of thoughts which could only add poignancy to her griefs, without enabling her to form any just conclusions as to the probable result of her singular situation.

Fortunately for Cecilia it was not possible for her to yield to gloomy forbodings in the society of Lodelli, whose unfailing loquacity ever put thought to flight; and who now entertained her lady with an account of the table of Ursulina, who, she affirmed, lived upon the best of every thing, and had treated her with a choice breakfast.

"The old woman is very comical, I can assure you, signora, and has such droll sayings, that it is enough to make one die with laughing to hear her:—and then she looks so grave and so formal all the while she's joking, that one would almost think her in earnest. She never asked me any questions though, and only said how glad she was that we were come to the castle,

and what a sweet gentle young signora you was. And it was a great pity, she said, that she durst not let you go out to take the air a little, but as that couldn't be helped, you must e'en try to amuse yourself within doors; and as the castle is very large and airy, I don't think that will be amiss, signora; for Ursulina told me that the passages and corridors were all so straight and wide that there was no danger of being lost in them. Will you chuse to go, signora?—It will be better than sitting to fret about what cannot be helped, and what one cannot rightly understand, if one thinks ever so much about it."

Cecilia was too perfectly aware of the justice of her attendant's simply-expressed opinion, not to acquiesce in the propriety of seeking to avoid the injurious indulgence of those useless and harrassing reflections that perpetually oppressed her mind; and therefore, when she had finished her temperate meal, she proceeded to explore the long galleries and various apartments of the castle; an employ which the active Lodelli also pursued with all the alacrity and pleasure which the idea of possibly discovering some avenue, leading out beyond the castle walls, imparted to her mind:—a circumstance most anxiously desired by this faithful being, who apprehended that the confinement of her lady might be prolonged beyond her wishes. This, however, was an anticipation of evil with which Lodelli did not add to the

distress of Cecilia by mentioning, and in deed the persecuted girl had no small occasion to feel grateful to the affectionate solicitude which her attached attendant now displayed, in order to divert her mind from recurring to the recollection of her singular situation. In the review of the massy edifice, in which Cecilia found herself a prisoner, there was much to interest. This castle, a large, spacious, yet compact building, formed an exact square, flanked at the four angles with large round towers, the heavy and dark battlements of which projected gloomily over the rocky platform on which the vast structure was erected; and which appeared to have been formed by almost inconceivable art and labour into a scite for so large an edifice; for while at the back and northern side of the castle, the rugged and misshapen cliffs reared their wild fantastic pinnacles far above the tops of the lofty towers, the opposite side was defended from the attacks of the hostile invader by the almost perpendicular descent of the dark-frowning rock. In the front of the fabric extended a paved but now grass-grown area, surrounded on three sides by embattled walls, heavy bastions, and small round towers, and shaded on the interior side by ranges of tall, luxuriant trees, the spreading branches of which half-obscured the massy entrance gates. An inner court, surrounded by cloisters of grey stone, and adorned by a marble fountain

placed exactly in the centre, and encircled by a number of time-worn and misshapen statues of saints and warriors, conveyed at once the idea of monkish seclusion, desolation, and the evidences of ill taste. The windows of several of the galleries looked into this gloomy court, but as they contained nothing to induce any one to visit them a second time, there was little reason to regret the want of prospect.

Almost all the other apartments in the castle were, however, in tolerable repair, and the heavy and ancient furniture and ornaments still exhibited lively traces of the magnificence of former days. The gilded cornices and carved pillars of the corridors that surrounded the lofty halls—the narrow painted windows, the fretted roofs and high-vaulted ceilings, the marble columns, remains of rich tapestries, statues and pictures, all evinced that the edifice had once been the residence of princely wealth and power.

Now a sad and silent gloom reigned throughout the long-deserted suites; and while in fancy she contrasted the splendour and festive revelry which had doubtless once pervaded the interior of the edifice, with the lonely air of solitude and decay which now distinguished the desolate halls and chambers, Cecilia, as the internal voice of truth whispered the passing folly of all sublunary cares and pleasures, experienced the calm of humble

resignation to her lot steal over her heart, and elevate her soul to the contemplation of that bright eternity, where anxious hope and timid fear can never intrude.

After a cursory survey of the main part of the castle, Cecilia would have proceeded to the investigation of the tower, but the lateness of the hour warned her to return to the apartment where she had breakfasted; and, on reaching it, she found that the peasant girl, whom Ursulina had called Paulini, was on the point of coming to seek her with the information that dinner waited.

The mind of Cecilia was too much preoccupied to suffer her to feel any appetite for this repast; and she soon left the meal to the enjoyment of Lodelli, whose ramble through the long corridors and galleries had not diminished her usual zest for good eating.

While her attendant was thus occupied, Cecilia returned to her own apartment, which she perceived had been perfectly well arranged during her absence, and which, as she had now attentively examined it, she thought to be one of the best and most pleasant chambers in the castle.

The windows, which were wide and large, fronted the south-east, and from them she now beheld a sublime and varied prospect, illumed by the yellow rays of an evening sun, and decked in all the illusive beauty which diversity of light and shade

gives to the bare mountain summits, and the forest-darkened vales.

After passing a few moments at the windows, Cecilia perceived that her chamber exactly adjoined the south-east tower. This circumstance, she discovered with an emotion of involuntary agitation which even surprised herself, and for which it was impossible to account. The observation of her own sensations, however, only increased the palpitation of her heart, and while, mournfully smiling at the weakness of her mind, she sought to divert her attention to other objects, Lodelli entered.

Should she attend the signora to any other parts of the castle that she might wish to see, was Lodelli's first question, and Cecilia immediately answered in the negative.

Should she remain with her lady lest she should be lonely, was the next; and as poor Lodelli spoke with a most wishful look, and betrayed a lingering reluctance to leave the room, Cecilia desired her to stay.

Thus gratified, it was impossible that Lodelli could long continue either silent or still. In a few minutes she also discovered that the south tower adjoined her lady's chamber; and she encreased the perturbation of Cecilia, by suddenly suggesting that probably there was some concealed door of communication between the tower and this chamber. To search for

this door was now her immediate proposal, Cecilia assented, and, in a very short time, the shrewd surmise of Lodelli was realised by the discovery of a small thickly pannelled door, hid from view by part of the tapestry that covered the walls of the room. This door, to the utter surprise of Cecilia, was half open, and while Lodelli exultingly congratulated herself on having made such a discovery, her lady threw open the door, and after a moment's hesitation passed through into a circular, vaulted room, lighted by three small gothic pointed windows, and wholly destitute of furniture. On the floor, however, lay scattered several fragments of rusty armour, and the hilt of a sword.

"This room appears never to have been used since that period when armour formed the warrior's safeguard in battle," observed Cecilia.

"As to that, I can't say, signora, but I'm sure that one wants an armour of courage to stay long in this dismal place.—Look, signora, one would almost think that that was a knight a hanging there," and Lodelli now directed the eyes of Cecilia to an entire suite of armour fastened together, and suspended from the wall: the breast plate, shivered and stained with clotted gore, revealed the fate of its owner, and the remains of the full plume, that once had proudly waved in the massy helmet, now hung, torn and covered with dust and cobwebs, over the vizor.

As Cecilia mournfully gazed upon these sad memorials of some fallen hero, Lodelli was fearfully peeping through a narrow, arched door, nearly opposite to that by which her lady and herself had entered, and which led out into the confined landing-place of a circular flight of stone stairs, dimly lighted by loopholes in the wall.

"Dear, I wonder where these stairs can lead to, signora.—Only up to the battlements, and down to the dungeons, I suppose though," exclaimed Lodelli, and thus drew the attention of Cecilia, who now approached the door, and venturing into the landing-place, glanced her eyes down the winding descent of the stairs; but the obscurity below veiled their termination from her sight.

An involuntary wish of exploring the whole of the tower impelled her to descend the stone stairs, but on mentioning her inclination to her attendant, the latter most earnestly persuaded her to delay the execution of her design till the following morning; representing that, as the evening was already closing in, it might not be safe to hazard missing their way amid the intricate and dark passages to which the stairs might lead.

Cecilia at length desisted from pursuing her intention, although by no means convinced that the least danger could attend her in obeying the impulse that inclined her to commence an immediate exploration of the tower.

In returning to her own apartment, she directed Lodelli to fasten the doors of the tower chamber; but they were now found to be without either bolts or locks, and appeared to have been fastened with iron bars. Those bars, however, were no longer there. To leave the doors open was therefore unavoidable, and although Cecilia did not apprehend any danger from the necessity of doing so, yet she could not suppress an uneasy sensation excited by the idea that there existed so insecure a communication between the room she occupied, and the lonely and deserted tower.

"I would have another room to sleep in immediately, signora," said Lodelli, while busily examining the door. "Who knows where that tower stairs may lead to!—May be, to some frightful, underground places, like the great dismal caverns under our sweet pleasant cottage, and so some horrible bandits might come up some night, and kill us downright. Indeed, signora, its enough to make one afraid when one thinks of those fierce looking men that brought us here, and who I dare say, know all the secret places of the castle. They might take care enough of us while in the employ of the marchese, but now that duty is over, they might take it into their heads to pay us a visit—And now, signora, I'll tell you what makes me think so: there was one of the men used to look at you so slily sometimes, when he thought nobody saw him, and fix his eyes upon

you in such a way, that a child might see how much he admired you. He was not ugly, signora, and if I had not known that he was a rogue, I might have taken him for an honest man. But some how I can't help thinking that, if that man could find an opportunity, he would be trying to see you again.—When we left him at that ferry-house, and were crossing the river in the boat, he stood by the edge of the river, and looked after us, as if his eyes would start out of his head; and when we got to the other side, and were mounted on our mules, climbing up those terrible rocks, I could see him stand a watching us till we were quite out of sight. And so, signora, I would have another room to sleep in this very night for fear of the worst."

Cecilia, who had not once observed that she was an object of particular attention to any one of the men who had conducted her on the journey, and who could now scarcely forbear smiling at the fears and representations of her simple attendant, was, nevertheless, aware that prudence dictated the propriety of guarding against the possibility of danger, although there might not exist any positive necessity for such precaution.

Of course she determined to request Dame Ursulina to accommodate her with an apartment well secured from intrusion. This prudent resolve was hardly avowed to Lodelli, when Paulini softly tapped

at the room door to say that Cecilia's supper was ready. The latter immediately proceeded to the eating room, where she found Ursulina busily engaged in arranging the repast.

The moment Cecilia entered, the old woman, with one of her most profound curtseys, said, "If the signora will permit me, *I* will wait her commands at supper, while her attendant can be very well served by Paulini, who has provided supper for her in my room."

Cecilia instantly acquisced, and Lodelli proceeded with Paulini to the housekeeper's room.

Every little decoration of the table which the custom of the times enjoined, had been studiously observed by Dame Usulina in the display of Cecilia's solitary meal, and had she been in a disposition to smile, she could not have been otherwise than diverted by what she could not, in her present situation, consider otherwise than as a most unnecessary formality. The assidious attention, however, with which Ursulina watched her slightest glance suggested to Cecilia a faint hope of so far interesting her feelings as to induce her to relax from the reserve which she evidently affected; but to avow the knowledge she had obtained that the Marchese di Rovenza was the owner of the castle, and the author of her confinement in so secluded a habitation, would possibly be attended with disagreeable consequences to both herself and

Lodelli. Influenced by this consideration, Cecilia hesitated for some moments ere she ventured to say—

"Are you informed as to the exact time I am to remain in the castle?"

Dame Ursulina's stuborn features dilated into something like a smile, as she significantly replied, "Ah, signora, you must think me very stupid indeed if I could be drawn in to say too much, by one so young and innocent as yourself.—Now, as I do not like to deceive you, and would not wish to be too severe, I must beg that you will not ask me any more questions.—Is it not enough for you to know that you are in no danger, and that you will be treated with all possible respect as long as you continue here.—You may be here all your life for what I can tell to the contrary."

"Good heaven!" exclaimed Cecilia, "and is it possible that the Marchese di Rovenza can be so cruel as to design to seclude me here for ever?" and then suddenly aware of the imprudence of what she had uttered, she was overwhelmed with confusion and distress; while Ursulina, regarding her with the most scrutinizing attention, repeated—

"The *Marchese*, the *Marchese* di Rovenza—hum! So then, signora, you imagine that the Marchese di Rovenza has sent you a long and dreary journey to this old deserted castle?"

There was so much of mingled irony and pity in the look of Dame Ursulina

as she pronounced these words, that Cecilia felt utterly confounded by the expression of her countenance, and had hardly power to articulate—

"Oh, I conjure you! relieve me from the strange, inexplicable fears and doubts your words have excited in my mind, and say, if not the marchese, who is the——"

"I know what you are going to say, young lady," interrupted Ursulina, in a peevish, hurried tone; "but as I am firmly resolved not to give you any answer such as you wish, I shall withdraw till you want me in my proper capacity only.—However, it may not be amiss to hint that if ladies, who ought to know better, will send their servants to listen and peep about in strange places, it's no wonder if they sometimes bring back tales which are very different from the real truth; for people must have good ears, and good memories, indeed, if, in catching up odd words, and scraps of a conversation, they can always avoid representing things very different from what they really are."

Ursulina now hastily quitted the room, while poor Cecilia, almost convulsed with the agony of her feelings, made no effort to detain her, and remained equally incapable of motion or reflection, till the speedy return of Ursulina, followed by Lodelli, gave a turn to the perplexity and distraction of her ideas

"Look," said the old woman as she entered, and violently shaking the arm of the

terrified Lodelli, "look into what a situation you have been the cause of throwing your lady, by the vile, idle tales you picked up last night, when you thought yourself so cunning in creeping about the castle to listen and frighten innocent people out of their wits."

"Innocent! innocent!—Saint Bridget! hear her," cried the alarmed and enraged Lodelli, while alternately rubbing the cold hands of Cecilia, and darting angry glances at the Dame Ursulina. "A wicked, abominable wretch, that as good as confessed a murder in my hearing, to be called innocent!"

"Murder!" stammered the old woman, while her retreating attitude and pallid looks spoke both fear and horror.

"Yes, murder!" loudly repeated Lodelli; "and I am sure 'tis true, or he would not have been so frightened when he got a fall at the foot of the old cross in the dark valley."

Ursulina, now gradually recovering from the dismay into which the words of Lodelli had apparently thrown her, tremulously said,

"Take care, young woman, how you repeat this strange accusation, or else you may repent it when too late."

Lodelli would have made another pert reply, but Cecilia, now rapidly reviving, faintly commanded her to silence, and desired to be led to her room.

This was a new incitement to the ireful

loquacity of Lodelli, who began to inveigh very loudly against the apartment assigned to the use of her lady, protesting that she was quite afraid to lead her dear signora to sleep in a room which, if it was not in danger from robbers, might certainly be haunted by the frightful ghosts that she was sure walked in the south tower.

Ursulina looked extremely surprised, and demanded an explanation. Cecilia was still too much agitated to give one; and Lodelli found some difficulty in making Ursulina comprehend that she had discovered a concealed door of communication between the chamber of her lady and the tower: when, however, the woman fully understood the occasion of her alarms, she seemed rather thoughtful and confused, and proposed accompanying Cecilia and her attendant to the room, in order to examine the door alluded to.

"And is my lady to sleep there then?"

"How can it be otherwise to-night?" angrily replied Ursulina, taking up a light and leading the way.

Cecilia, dreading a renewal of the altercation, again desired Lodelli to be silent; yet this faithfully attached being could not forbear, while supporting the trembling frame of her young mistress, uttering innumerable half-suppressed invectives against the marchese, and those whom she still supposed to be the agents of his plans, for confining Cecilia.

Ursulina did not appear to attend to her

expressions; and when they had reached the chamber, she examined the door leading into the tower with so much indifference, that it was evident she attached no consequence to the discovery; and by a few well-timed assurances that she would on the morrow convince Cecilia that she was in the power of those by whom her ease and safety would ever be most studiously considered, she endeavoured to reconcile the afflicted girl to the painful incertitude of her extraordinary situation, averring at the same time that there was not the slightest occasion to be alarmed by the idea of being disturbed by any disagreeable intruders from the deserted tower, as there were no subterraneans, except the vaults and dungeons, underneath the castle, and which were wholly inaccessible to any person without the walls.

The manner in which Dame Ursulina spoke convinced Cecilia that any further conversation on the latter subject could not, at least for the present, be productive of any pleasing result, therefore she endeavoured to appear satisfied, and merely saying, that in consequence of her own indisposition, she should retain Lodelli to pass the night in her chamber, intimated to Ursulina that she might retire. The old woman, with one of her usual curtsies, wished her a good repose, and immediately withdrew.

The moment Ursulina was gone, Lodelli began to contrive various methods

of fastening the door of the dreaded tower, and at length attempted to secure it by tying the projecting remains of a rusty bolt to one of the large heavy chairs, with the strong cord and tassels belonging to the window curtains—an invention which, as the door opened inwards, on the tower chamber, she exultingly declared would render them perfectly secure—" For," added she, " you see, signora, that the chair is much wider than the door, and if they should drag ever so hard, they cannot get in unless they were to break the cord, and in doing that, they must make so much noise in pulling the chair, that we shall have warning of the danger, and time to run away."

Thus prated Lodelli, till Cecilia, anxious to be left to reflection, yet unwilling to check the artless loquacity of her faithful attendant, affected to be inclined to repose, when the latter was instantly silenced, and took her station on a couch at the other end of the room.

Repose, however, was for that night far from the tearful eyelids of Cecilia, who, as her tortured memory revolved the strange and afflictive circumstances in which she had been involved for several months past, would almost have doubted that incidents so extraordinary were any other than the wild fantasies of a deranged imagination, had not the sad reality of the anguish that now racked her heart, the tears of heartfelt grief and apprehension

which she shed, forbidden her yielding to the illusive incredulity of the moment. Her retrospection of the past was, as usual, of no avail but to increase her sorrow—her view of the present so bewildering and unsatisfactory, that it only added new terrors to the prospect of the dreaded future: yet notwithstanding her conviction that no reflection could either explain or amend her situation, still she meditated on the mysteries in which she was involved, till the powers of reason almost yielded to the perplexity, horror, and grief, which the inexplicability of her fate occasioned her to endure.

That the Marchese di Rovenza had really sent her as a prisoner to the isolated castle in which she now found herself confined, she soon felt inclined to believe, notwithstanding the intimation to the contrary given her by Ursulina at supper, and which, on reflection, she justly supposed to be a mere evasion to avoid confessing the truth: but wherefore the marchese should affect so much secrecy on the occasion, as the reserve of his agents evidently implied he did, Cecilia could not comprehend, unless indeed he intended to confine her for life, and did not think proper to suffer her to know by whose authority she was held in durance. Yet this did not appear to be very probable, as his motive for secluding her must cease with the marriage of Ottavania. Of this union Cecilia did not dare to think even for a moment; yet the re-

membrance of Orazio di Udina, connected as his idea was with all the late unpleasant incidents of her life, was seldom absent from her mind: but if the lovely girl could not always suppress those emotions of tenderness and regret with which she was but too much inclined to consider him, she nevertheless carefully shunned the indulgence of those illusive hopes which his animated professions of affection were but too well formed to inspire in a heart innocent and unsuspicious as her own. But while Cecilia was thus prudent in attaching no importance to the vows of Orazio, she still thought him entitled to her liveliest gratitude for the delicacy and concern which he had evinced for her peace of mind in his manner of mentioning Angelo Guicciardini, her relationship to whom seemed so well confirmed by several corroborating circumstances, that she could only deplore what she would have given worlds to have had cause to doubt. That her mother's birth was noble she knew from her own assertion. In what manner her fate became linked with the fortunes of Angelo Guicciardini she had yet to learn. That this fatal connexion had rendered the signora an alien to her home, and an object of hatred and revenge, seemed well evinced by the mysterious seclusion she had observed while residing for so many years at the cottage on the banks of the Lago Maggiore, and by the vindictive conduct of the Count de Weilburgh. That this

personage was a relation of her mother's Cecilia had very reasonably conjectured on her first learning the dreadful probability that she owed her being to Angelo Guicciardini; and admitting the latter circumstance to be a fact, the violent proceedings of the count were perfectly well accounted for. "And whence, indeed, but from a deep sense of family degradation, could arise this nobleman's vengeful hatred to myself?" mentally argued the sorrowing girl—"a hatred which is cherished against an unoffending being, whose birth alone could have been the cause of his enmity to her. Oh! my mother! dear, beloved parent! what may not thy sufferings be, if still in the power of that irritated relative? or what may prove the fate of my wretched, guilty father, should he fail in the bold attempt of forcing you from the retreat in which the authority of the count has placed you?"

It was in these moments of insupportable anxiety that the afflicted Cecilia considered her confinement in the castle as a circumstance most unfortunate, as her seclusion would of course deprive her of every hope of beholding her parents—of consoling the sorrows of the one, and of endeavouring to aid in the pious effort of reclaiming an erring father from the paths of infamy and ruin—a sacred duty, which filial hope and tenderness suggested to her artless mind would not be unattended by success, as the character of Angelo was al

least free from the stigma of that cruelty and depravity which usually distinguished the names of those banditti chiefs who were rendered too famous for their dreadful exploits. And while the poor Cecilia thus lamented the too probable disappointment of all the hopes which the inexperience and guileless virtue of her heart inclined her at intervals to cherish, her thoughts usually reverted to the painful but deeply-interesting consideration as to what might be the nature of those circumstances that could have plunged her unfortunate father into the dire necessity of adopting a mode of life the most repugnant to every principle of religion, honour, and morality: yet fearing to impute this ever to be lamented fact to his having committed some crime, the threatened consequences of which might have deprived him of every other resource, and shuddering with horror at the bare supposition that voluntary choice had influenced him to embrace so dreadful a profession, Cecilia durst not even for a moment suffer herself to reflect too deeply on this point; yet the almost unceasing agony of mind which she endured on this occasion, united with her sorrow and anxiety respecting her beloved mother's safety, struck such pangs to her heart, that, ere the morning dawned, she was feverish and nearly delirious. Soon her deep moans, her half-breathed ejaculations of grief and distraction, awakened her faithful Lodelli, whose alarm at find-

ing her in such a state of indisposition was so great, that it deprived her of the power of utterance, and for some moments she stood wringing her hands in silent dismay ere she ran to call Ursulina, and implore some immediate remedy. Fortunately the old woman was already risen, and, to the great joy of poor Lodelli, professed herself tolerably capable of rendering some assistance to her lady, whose indisposition seemed to give her unfeigned concern.

A small private cupboard in her own room, well stored with simple medicines and cordials, and from which she now cautiously selected a vial, seemed to confirm to the watchful, trembling Lodelli, that Dame Ursulina had not falsely boasted of her own skill; and she most eagerly led the old woman to the apartment of Cecilia.

The lovely, suffering girl was now induced, by the tremulous entreaties of Dame Ursulina, and the tearful importunities of Lodelli, to swallow the medicine prepared by the former, and in a short time her spirits were considerably calmed: but notwithstanding all the care and anxiety of her assiduous attendants, she continued so much indisposed for several days, that she was compelled to confine herself to her chamber.

During this period of suffering, Dame Ursulina manifested so much solicitude and concern for the recovery of Cecilia,

and attended her every wish with such tenderness and care,. that it was impossible for the latter not to experience sensations of most unfeigned gratitude for those kindnesses which seemed the result of a sincere anxiety for the restoration of her health, independent of every other consideration; and even the prejudices of Lodelli were conquered by the satisfaction and pleasure she derived from witnessing the old woman's unwearied concern and goodnature. But although Ursulina was thus kind and attentive in the present instance, yet she never once mentioned the name of the owner of the castle; nor did Cecilia longer think it just to tempt the fidelity she owed her master by asking her any further questions on the subject.

CHAP. X.

WHEN Cecilia was again as convalescent as the troubled state of her mind would permit her to be, and was able to revisit the lower apartments of the castle, Ursulina endeavoured to ameliorate the irksome and suspensive melancholy of her situation, by furnishing her with some books, an old well-toned lute, several pieces of ancient music, a few indifferent impliments for drawing, and an embroidering frame with tolerable materials for its employment. But the sad heart of Cecilia was not at-

tuned to that pensive resignation which might have permitted her to avail herself of these means of occupying or amusing the lonely hours as they slowly passed away; and therefore she preferred to wander alone through the desolate halls and galleries of the castle, where, unobserved and unheard, she could weep the strange calamities of her destiny, and pray for hope and fortitude to support the evils to which she too justly feared she should be exposed.

Suspense, which ever adds new terror to anticipated trouble and danger, daily increased her unhappiness, and after a weary residence of three weeks in the castle, she was fast inclining to the opinion that the marchese had determined to imprison her for life: this idea had almost plunged her into despondence, when one morning she was early informed by Ursulina that her lord was arrived, and had commanded her to request the signora to favour him with an opportunity of offering her his respects.

This was a message in a style so unsuitable for the marchese to use, that Cecilia scarcely knew in what light to consider it; but she was too much agitated to give so comparatively an unimportant subject much reflection, and therefore, directing Ursulina simply to say she would immediately attend her lord, prepared to follow to the saloon where she was informed he waited.

Ursulina smiled and withdrew.

Fain would Cecilia have avoided so immediate an interview. The arrival of her self-constituted guardian was an event so wholly unexpected by her, that she was unprepared either with remonstrances on the power he had usurped over her liberty, or arguments to induce him to set her free, should she find him still inclined to imprison her in the castle. Delay, however, was now beyond her power, and, with a silent aspiration to heaven for calmness and resolution, she descended to the apartment to which she had been directed by Ursulina. It was a large Gothic saloon on the east side of the great hall, and magnificently furnished; yet so dimly lighted by several narrow arched windows, deeply shaded by an abrupt and wooded rise of the mountain, that a heavy gloom pervaded the room even at mid-day. As Cecilia approached towards this saloon, she perceived that one of the grotesquely carved leaves of the folding doors was flung wide open, and in the next moment she observed a tall elegant figure pacing the room with a very disturbed air. She paused. The figure did not in the least degree resemble that of the marchese, yet she fancied she was not unacquainted with the air of the cavalier.

In a moment her doubts were decided, for, turning abruptly, he started, flew towards her, and presented to her view the form and features of Leonardo di Rovenza.

Passionately catching her hand, and uttering a torrent of half-incoherent excuses for his yet unexplained conduct, he now hastily gave the astonished Cecilia to understand that to him she was indebted for her most distressing confinement in the castle.

Alarm and offended delicacy were soon so much mingled with her sensations of surprise on beholding him, that she would almost instantly have flown from his presence, had he not most earnestly implored her to hear his immediate exculpation of an act which, while she continued a stranger to his motives for so strange a procedure, must appear singularly reprehensible in her sight.

Respect and eager anxiety were so predominant in the manners and looks of the Signor Leonardo as he urged his request, that Cecilia was at length induced to accompany him into the saloon, partly influenced by the momentary reflection that should she now decline listening to his explanations, she should merely delay the information that she certainly wished to receive from his lips, and consequently but expose herself to a continuance of all the painful suspense which she had hitherto found insupportable.

Her compliance in entering the saloon, however, she almost instantly repented; for her so doing seemed to give increased animation to the looks of Leonardo, who had scarcely led her to a chair, ere he

again burst forth into the most extravagant assurances of the regrets he felt for having caused her even a moment's uneasiness; and while professing every possible inclination to regard her with the most inviolable deference and respect, contradicted himself by uttering a aphrsodical declaration of the violent passion with which her beauty had inspired him, and by avowing that he had had her conveyed to the castle in order to avail himself of the opportunity which her enforced residence in it would give him for pleading his claims to her affections, and to secure her from the importunities of his rivals.

The amazement and distress which Cecilia experienced while listening to this abrupt and singular avowal, prevented her attempting to interrupt him.

That Leonardo should prove the cause of her long lamented seclusion; that his motives were such as he confessed them to be; and that she was now indeed placed far beyond the knowledge of the few friends she possessed, were reflections that plunged her into the deepest affliction and terror; and as all the difficulties and dangers of her situation became more apparent to her imagination, she found herself less capable of speaking or of resenting his conduct in the manner which she wished yet feared to exert.

Her silence and embarrassment might have excited the most flattering hopes of ultimate success in the mind of her pre-

suming lover, had not the expression of unfeigned grief, astonishment, and alarm which pervaded her lovely countenance,' checked all his rising presentiments of promised happiness.

In the pause which followed his precipitate and wildly animated declarations, he observed her with the keenest and most eager attention for a few moments in silence; and but too well discerning in her expressive, yet downcast looks, the enanguished state of her mind, he more timidly resumed his protestations of respectful and ardent affection; and at length, in the gentlest and most soothing tone, implored her forgiveness.

Relieved in some measure from the overwhelming fear and agitation which his loud, impassioned accents had at first caused her to suffer, Cecilia now recovered her recollection, and endeavouring to assume a calmness which she did not feel, she said:—

"You importune me, signor, to listen with favourable attention to an exculpation of your motives for tearing me from the protection which your parents so generously afforded to my helpless state. What has that promised exculpation proved—a confession of motives and designs equally derogatory to you to form, and for me to hear; and to which it is impossible I should reply but by a silence, that can best express my deep sense of the injury you have done me; and my abhorrence of

your conduct. You have assured me that I shall never be permitted to leave the castle unless I become your bride. You thus add mockery and dissimulation to the injustice of your proceedings; for, inexperienced as I am in the cruel wiles of a world, of which, alas! I have already seen too much, I am not credulous enough to suppose that the son of the illustrious Marchese di Rovenza could seriously intend to unite himself with the wretched offspring of Angelo Guicciardini; for such you have doubtless heard me pronounced."

Cecilia paused. With amazement she perceived new delight and animation illume the eyes, and crimson the cheek of Leonardo, as, hardly permitting her to finish, he eagerly exclaimed:—

"Ah! then I may yet be blest! Lovely Cecilia, if to your doubts of my sincerity I am to attribute the timid reserve and apprehension—the chilling displeasure with which you receive my fervent protestations, how speedily shall all thy cruel incredulity be dissipated. Say but that you will be mine, and to-morrow's dawn beholds Cecilia the bride of Leonardo di Rovenza; of him, who in the daughter of Angelo Guicciardini, comprises all the hopes—the bliss of his earthly existence. Oh! deign to bless me with one approving glance, so shall I read in thy consenting smile, the assurance of my unbounded felicity, and the termination of the torments which fear-

ful and suspensive love has long inflicted on my heart."

While Leonardo, in the most impassioned style, continued his importunities, Cecilia gazed upon him with looks of enquiry and dismay, for judging from his language, and the wild impetuosity of his manner, that he certainly was labouring under a degree of mental derangement, she felt all her anger subside into the pity with which the idea of his deplorable state inspired her; and conceiving that any further conversation might only irritate his feelings, without benefiting herself, she receded a few steps towards the door, saying:—

"Suffer me to retire, signor. When you are more composed we may meet again. The fatigue of your journey calls for repose; and——"

Transported by the sudden belief that the timid retreat of Cecilia was occasioned by her desire of concealing from his immediate observation the pleasure which the declaration of his horrible intentions had communicated to her mind, Leonardo now threw himself at her feet, and while he passionately raised her trembling hand to his lips, he exclaimed,

"Lovely, adored Cecilia! accept my grateful homage for this sweet, yet too timid indication that you do not reject my ardent vows. Oh! that the lingering hours that must precede to-morrow's joyous morn were passed, and——"

Shuddering with encreased alarm, Ce-

cilia struggled to disengage her hand from the close grasp of Leonardo, and interrupting him by her half fearful, half angry entreaties to be permitted to withdraw, she broke from his hold, and hastily fled from the saloon, nor paused till she had reached her own chamber.

CHAP. XI.

Overpowered by her agitation and recent exertion, Cecilia sunk on a chair near the entrance, and for some moments her ideas were so confused, that she was hardly sensible of her situation.

With returning recollection arose the alarming conviction that her state was a thousand times more dreadful than had she been confined by the will of the Marchese di Rovenza. The utmost extent of all she might have to apprehend from his unauthorised exertion of power was confinement, either till such time as he should consider her as no longer an obstacle to the plans with which he imagined she might interfere, or at worst seclusion for life. But to be subjected to the capricious persecution of a dissipated young man, whose intellects seemed almost deranged by the recent unfortunate attack upon his life, to be confined with him in an isolated and impenetrable fortress, hourly exposed to all his dreaded importunities, and to the

probable insults which his habits of self-indulgence might induce him to offer, formed a climax of misfortune such as her keenest anticipation of impending trouble had never led her to surmise probable. The more deeply she reflected on this fearful dilemma, the more confounded and dismayed she became.

Not the faintest hope existed in her mind of being able to find either means or opportunity of escape. In all her melancholy preambulations through the long forsaken apartments, and dreary avenues of the castle, she had never discovered any unsecured outlet; and she knew she had no assistance to hope from the pertinacious fidelity of Dame Ursulina, of whom, since she now found who was her lord and master, she could no longer retain the least favourable sentiment; but considering her as a wretched being abjectly devoted to the commands of an unprincipled young man, she shuddered and recoiled in horror and grief at the idea of her depravity, and the cunning with which she could assume the semblance of honesty and good-nature.

The ignorance and stupidity of the other female domestic, Paulini, appeared to the mind of the now nearly distracted Cecilia, as little favourable to her wish of escape, as did the art and watchful care of Ursulina; and although possessed of ample means of bribing this simple rustic to her interest, yet she feared to make the attempt,

lest discovery and disappointment should be the first consequence of such a step, and might ultimately frustrate any other expedient that might occur to her. Still, however, the idea that the simple Paulini could possibly be won to assist her retreat, was too pleasing to be wholly relinquished, and Cecilia at length had begun to consider in what manner she should most cautiously commence her little experiment, when Lodelli, suddenly entering, checked the course of her reflections. "There, signora, there," instantly exclaimed Lodelli, "there, now did not I tell you this would all come to pass?—O, I well knew that my dream about the Signor Leonardo's coming to woo you the other night could not mean nothing, and now you see it's all out, for instead of being indebted for our fine long journey, and our melancholy lodging here to his excellenza the marchese, it proves after all that the signor his son has run away with us, and all for love of you, signora mia.—You'll have him, won't you, signora? I'm sure, it's long before that false-hearted Signor Orazio would have had courage to run away with you in such a manner, only to make you a great and rich lady."

"Lodelli!" tremulously ejaculated Cecilia, amazed and dismayed by the altered manner of her attendant, who now spoke with more than her usual volubility, and whose looks, even while she urged her lady to listen to the Signor Leonardo, expressed

infinitely more terror and uneasiness than pleasure, "what is the real import of looks and language so much at variance?"

"Variance! signora.—I'm sure I'm not at variance with any body—but—but I think—if I might presume to advise, that the sooner you consent to marry the Signor Leonardo, the better it will be:" and now the ill-restrained tears started in the poor young woman's down-cast eyes.

With increased alarm and anxiety, Cecilia peremptorily demanded an explanation, and after a little more hesitation, Lodelli said,

"Well then, signora mio, if I must tell you all—that wicked, abominable, false-smiling hag, Ursulina, says that her lord, the illustrious Signor Leonardo, ought not to degrade himself by suing to a—a little, paltry—I beg pardon, signora, for only repeating what she said—a vile wretch?" and Lodelli's passion seemed almost to choak her utterance while she sobbingly continued, "a little, paltry, crying girl, who would soon be glad to kneel at his feet, and beg him to have her, if he was not so over delicate with his squeamish scruples of insulting her virtue. There's devilish wickedness, signora. St. Bridget assist us out of this horrible den of abomination! So you see, signora, what was my reason for praying you to have the signor as soon as you can."

"And to whom did this dreadful being

make those shocking expressions?" tremblingly asked the terrified Cecilia, while the pale hue of death stole over her lovely features. "To me, signora. She had even the assurance to say all this to me and Fillipo, the signor's man, as he sat eating in her own room—Ay, ay, signora, she has dropped her mask now, I'll assure you, and so I don't know what sad doings we may not expect. I thought sometimes, the saints guard us; I thought, I always saw something hollow in her smiles and whining tones, when you were sick; and now I'm sure she only took care of you for fear the signor should scold her if you were ill when he came."

Cecilia heard not the conclusion of Lodelli's speech; her thoughts were directed to that gracious and omnipotent power, against whose awful will the wicked cannot contend; and as she once more raised her hopes to heaven's protecting aid, the supplicatory tear shone on a cheek irradiated by the glow of pious confidence.

"Ever acknowledged by the tongue of faith be the balmy and consoling influence of religious hope!" she mentally aspirated as her subsiding alarms left her mind free to the more calm and rational consideration of the dangers of her situation, and to the reflection of how they might be best avoided. To Lodelli's continued lamentations and forebodings, she again attended with feelings far dissimilar from those she had experienced at the beginning

of her attendant's information of Ursulina's vileness, and she now interrupted her by saying—

" My faithful Lodelli must not distress both me and herself by exaggerated fears, when we might be so much more profitably employed in reflecting how to escape the threatening evils."

" Escape, signora!" exclaimed Lodelli; " why, have we not been searching every corner and passage to see how we could get out for near a fortnight, and if we have not been able to find a loophole in all that time, how are we to do it before to-morrow?"

" I have the means of endeavouring to gain the assistance of Paulini," answered Cecilia: " she is doubtless acquainted with several avenues from the castle, which are still unknow to us."

The features of Lodelli brightened at this suggestion, and, with all the alacrity which usually distinguished her actions, she flew towards the door, protesting that she would that very moment hasten to seek the girl, and try to discover how far she could be depended upon. This precipitasion was instantly checked by Cecilia, who soon convinced her of the necessity of using precaution, and some degree of reserve, in the prosecution of the intended project. At length it was agreed that Lodelli should watch her opportunity of speaking to Paulini, when Ursulina should be occupied in her attendance on the Sig-

nor Leonardo, with whom, Lodelli declared, she had already been closeted after Cecilia had left him in the saloon. She now learnt from her attendant that Leonardo had brought with him to the castle only his own valet, and that he had travelled through the mountainous regions leading thither no otherwise attended.

This information confirmed her in the idea that Leonardo's intellects were not entirely perfect; and attributing this derangement to the suspensive agitation and anxiety which he had suffered for the success of his plans upon herself, co-operating with the injury his health had sustained from the treacherous act of Faenza, she recoiled in internal horror from the contemplation of how ungoverned were the feelings which could have urged him to tear an unfortunate like herself from the protection which her family had afforded her, even while she almost pitied the sad effects produced on his mind by the indulgence of his unfettered passions.

Happily for herself, her confidence in heaven revived with the encreasing exigencies of the moment. She felt that to yield to the oppressive fears that her circumstances were so well formed in inspire, would only subject her to certain ruin, while exertion and fortitude might help to ensure her deliverance from the impending perils. Silencing, therefore, as much as possible her own alarms, and the fears of Lodelli, she soon dismissed the latter to

make her observations in the apartment of the hypocritical Dame Ursulina; and in the peaceful solitude of her room offered up her pious petitions to the Most High.

CHAP. XII.

THE fervent aspirations of Cecilia were, however, soon interrupted by the return of Lodelli, followed by Ursulina, whose looks now struck disgust and amazement to the innocent heart of the persecuted girl, while they also fully displayed the innate depravity of a heart schooled in the wiles of deception. No longer the solemn, grave precision, the sometimes fawning smile, marked the air and face of Ursulina, but the scowl of confident impertinence, and the consequential sneer of vulgar insolence, invested with the power of torturing the helpless and unfortunate; the whining tone of affected honesty and good-nature, were now exchanged for the harsh, hoarse growl of command; and as she placed a tray of refreshments on a marble table near the first window, she threw an oblique, malevolent glance on the amazed, trembling Cecilia, and muttered,

"The signor is too ill to see you any more to-day, signora, and therefore you must remain in your chamber, and as I don't want spies and impertinent busy

bodies about me, your attendant shall be locked up with you."

"Am I then to be a prisoner?" exclaimed Cecilia, her indignation conquering her fears.

"Prisoner!" retorted Ursulina, moving towards the door, and clanking loudly a heavy bunch of keys which she now took from her side:—"'Tis well if you are nothing worse than a prisoner soon, if you provoke people beyond their patience. Had I earlier known you as well as I do now, you would not have fared so well as you have done hitherto."

She then quitted the room, and instantly locking the door after her, Cecilia heard in silent dismay that the key was removed, and added to those already in the possession of this abominable being. Till her receding steps had ceased to echo along the narrow passage leading to the corridor, Cecilia spoke not—horror had sealed her lips; the artless mind of the timid sufferer had never conceived that such a being could really exist, for although assured that vice is too frequently concealed by the semblance of common goodness, yet that a human being could be so far depraved she had never before witnessed. Yet the conviction of Ursulina's real character served but to inspire her with new hope; for she felt intuitively assured that heaven would not desert the innocent who cried for protection against one, whose soul seemed

deformed by all the malevolent cruelty which distinguishes a fiend-like spirit.

As for poor Lodelli, for the first time in her life she appeared to be totally confounded; and while with pallid lips she silently repeated her aves, she gazed on her lady to watch the effect which the sudden development of Ursulina's character would produce on one so good, so gentle, and so pious, as was Cecilia. The moment she perceived returning composure beam on the sweet but sad countenance of her lovely lady, her own troubles seemed to vanish, and, with her usual loquacity, she railed against the old woman at one moment, and in the next prayed all the saints to deliver her dear signora and herself from the castle and its wicked inhabitants.

"Is the Signor Leonardo really ill?" enquired Cecilia, when Lodelli, almost breathless, paused.

"Not that I know of, signora," replied she; "but I cannot say for certain whether he is or no; for the moment I reached this wicked housekeeper's room, who should I see there but Paulini quite alone, and I began to question her directly; that is, I asked her if she was fond of ear-rings and rosaries, and ribbons and relics, and finding, by the glistening of her eyes at the very mention of them, that she loved finery better than holy things, I was just going to tell her that I could put her in a way of getting plenty of them, when in comes that

vile Ursulina, and immediately giving Paulini a great box of the ear, she drove her out, and then turned towards me, and I verily believe would have struck me too if she dared, but seeing by my looks that I would'n't take that very quietly, she grinned at me so spitefully, that I could hardly help laughing at her; and then she bid me get back to your room, if ever I wished to see you again, signora. You may be sure my laughing was over then, and, in my fright, I asked the old ugly creature what was the matter, but she gave me no answer, and snatching up the tray, which was already filled with the refreshments, she loudly bid me go on before her to your room, and vowed that if I dared to say a word more to her, I should not be suffered to come near you again. So I ran on, and when I came into the room, I was obliged to be silent, lest she should be as good as her word, and plan some cunning trick to keep me away from you, signora. But what shall we do now, signora? I'm sure there are no more hopes of bribing poor Paulini, and as we are locked up, and——"

"The tower is still open to us, Lodelli," observed Cecilia; "and on recollection, I think there is one door on the lower landing-place, the bolts of which are so much rusted and worn, that, with courage and exertion, they might be removed by us."

All the sanguine expectancy of Lodelli's disposition was awakened by these sug-

gestions, and, with renewed animation, she would have instantly commenced the examination of the alluded to door, had not Cecilia prevented her by pointing out the probable danger of discovery that might be incurred by leaving her apartment until midnight, as Ursulina would possibly return to observe whether they were both secure.

When this prudent delay was fixed upon, Lodelli urged her lady to take some of the refreshments, and Cecilia immediately complied, in the hope of recruiting her strength and spirits, preparatory to the researches planned for the night; an example which Lodelli needed no very pressing invitation to imitate.

Many long and anxious hours were yet to elapse, ere the period of visiting the tower should arrive; and Cecilia resolved to occupy that interval in consulting with her faithful attendant as to what course they should pursue, provided any outlet from the castle should be discovered by them. The gold presented by the majordomo of the Marchese di Rovenza as the gift of his lord was still in the possession of Lodelli, and could Cecilia and herself once escape about a league or two from the castle, every probable hope of assistance in their further progress might be entertained. From the peril of wandering unprotected amid the dismal wilds of the mountains, the timid apprehensions of Cecilia made her involuntarily recoil,

more on Lodelli's account than on her own, for although the amiable girl felt that she could summon sufficient courage to attempt braving the dangers to which the hapless necessity of her circumstances inevitably exposed herself, yet she shrunk from the idea of beholding the valued and attached servant of her youth but too possibly falling the victim of hunger and fatigue, should they lose themselves in the unfrequented intricacies of the dreary regions they must resolve to explore. Tears of affectionate regard and trembling anticipation glittered in the full, expressive eyes of the timid Cecilia, as her looks of tender compassion and gratitude beamed on the attentive countenance of Lodelli, who, now anxiously observing every turn of her features, soon read the feelings of a soul that never knew deceit, and fully comprehending the nature of her fears, endeavoured to chase those mournful apprehensions that marked the heart-fraught expression of Cecilia's looks, by whimsically laughing at the supposition of peril.

"If we stay here, signora," said the good-humoured young woman, "we have enough to be afraid of I think from that old witch, Ursulina, and that mad-headed Signor Leonardo, who has played more wicked pranks in running after poor innocent girls, and fine signoras, than any other cavalier in Venice; but if we can get away, I'm sure we shall have St. Bridget for our guide, and I'll warrant me she won't lead us astray."

Cecilia could scarcely forbear a smile at the solemnity with which poor Lodelli averred her certainty of the protection of St. Bridget, and justly contrasting the evils which awaited her in the castle, with those dreaded ones that might never occur in their intended wanderings, regained some portion of courage, and again imploring the protection of heaven in their flight, could the projected escape be indeed accomplished, demanded of her attendant whether they could not be sufficiently prepared to leave the castle that very night, should they succeed in finding any avenue which led beyond the walls.

"This very hour we might fly, signora, if it depended only on my getting a few things ready to take with us; and now I think on it we cannot do better than set off to-night if we can, for as you may not be locked up in this curious manner another day, we may never have another opportunity of furnishing ourselves with some provisions to chear us by the way. Now, the remains of this flask of wine, these nice dried fruits, this slice of ham, and all the other little niceties left on the tray, will prove a very comfortable treat among the mountains, and so, as I said before, we may as well set off while we are so well provided for the journey."

The remainder of the day was now spent in various reflections on the best means of avoiding the dangers they might en-

counter, and ere the evening closed, so many arrangements on the subject had been made, that, added to the circumstance of packing up a few necessary articles of apparel, and securing the remnants of the day's repast, neither Cecilia nor her merry-hearted attendant could bear to think there existed the least probability of being disappointed in the fulfilment of their well-considered plans.

As the dark hours advanced, and the mournful vibrations of the distant clocks of the castle sounded along the battlements proclaiming the departure of time, the heart of Cecilia palpitated with emotions of expectation and fear, and she became momentarily too much agitated to converse; while even Lodelli seemed to forget her seldom-ceasing loquacity in the trembling anticipation of the approaching hour of hope for liberty.

At length the midnight hour arrived, and all the solemnity of a deathlike silence gave to imagination new images of fear. The sound of her own footsteps gave trepidation to the beating heart of Cecilia, as she slowly paced the dark oaken floor of her chamber, and the shadows, produced by the waving of the flame in her lamp, as the reflection of its light was intercepted by surrounding objects from falling full on the tapestried walls, caused her to start.

"O, dear signora," faintly whispered Lodelli, "if you are so frightened here,

what will you be when we are passing through the different rooms in the tower, where, for aught we know to the contrary, fifty shocking murders may have happened, and where the poor soul of some unburied ghost may be wandering and wailing?"

This mention of a poor unburied ghost, and Lodelli's mournful voice, recalled Cecilia to a sense of the weakness she was so improperly betraying, and, attempting to smile, she checked the involuntary impulses of alarm that agitated her bosom, and, assuring Lodelli that her apprehensions proceeded only from the dread of disappointment, she approached the window, and looking anxiously towards the heavens, beheld the moon, sailing high in the dark blue firmament, and surrounded by all the other brilliant orbs of night.

The beauty of moonlight scenery, the solemn tranquillity of the hour, had, however, lost their powers of soothing her perturbed mind, and, with a slight observation on the calmness of the weather, she turned from the window, and taking the lamp from the trembling hand of Lodelli, softly led the way into the tower chamber. Through this room they hurried with all possible speed, and quickly descending the spiral stone stairs, arrived at the door spoken of by Cecilia as the one that appeared to be the least secured. The bolts, as she had surmised, did not long resist the strength of Lodelli's healthy and robust arm, but when at length they were undrawn,

and the door opened, they found that instead of leading out on the rocks as they had expected, it was the entrance of a wide arched passage of undistinguishable length. After some moments hesitation, Cecilia proposed proceeding, and Lodelli of course assented.

With cautious steps they swiftly passed along this dreary passage, while through the narrow loop-holes, deeply indented on one side in the massy wall, the moonlight penetrated and ofttimes caused them to start, as the sudden gleams feebly illuminated the opposite side. The passage, from its long extent, seemed to run along one entire side of the castle, and, on reaching the termination, they found themselves at the foot of another flight of spiral stairs, that appeared to lead up into the apartment of a tower, similar to that which they had quitted.

Cecilia sighed and hesitated, while Lodelli, now declaring that it was useless to go on any further, as they should merely have the trouble of going all round the castle and to no purpose, proposed an immediate return, in order to try the other door of the tower adjoining her lady's apartment. Cecilia, however, could not resolve to discontinue her research, and in a few minutes both ascended the stone stairs, which soon conducted them, not into the circular chamber of a tower, but into a very magnificent gallery, which Cecilia had never seen in her daily rambles

through the castle, and which was hung with some of the best historical pictures of the earlier schools, the ponderous frames still glittering with the splendid gilding, and the pillars, ceiling, and cornices of the gallery, all equally showy.

Rather bewildered and distressed at finding herself so unexpectedly in a part of the castle hitherto unknown by her, Cecilia once more paused to consider whether she should proceed or return, till a deep groan, uttered by Lodelli, and her falling instantly to the floor, caused her to draw back her veil and look around, when, to her inexpressible horror and consternation, a figure, in all respects resembling that dreadful one she had beheld in the oratory of the Villa di Rovenza, suddenly glided past her, and vanished in the obscurity of a distant part of the gallery. The same deathlike countenance—the long white drapery—the dark, long hand clasping it on the bosom, and the never-forgotten expression of the fixed, lifeless eye, were all the same; and while the harrowed memory of Cecilia too faithfully represented to her imagination the outline of that ghastly spectre, her eye-balls started in the enhor rored gaze with which she recognized the terrific object. So great, so awful was that horror which now enchained her faculties, that she stood motionless and vaguely staring on vacancy long after the dreadful cause of her terrors had melted from her view. The poor Lodelli was the

first who recovered, but had nearly relapsed again on beholding the frightful state of her lady, who for some moments remained insensible to her fear-suppressed sighs and entreaties; and when at length she in some degree comprehended the import of the imploring expressions her attendant so tremblingly uttered, in order to prevail upon her to quit the gallery, she suddenly, and with almost unconscious haste, fled so precipitately, that the latter, unaided by the wild impulse which gave speed to the steps of her lady, could not keep pace with her, till after flying down the winding of the spiral stairs, the false strength of Cecilia failed, and she fell senseless at the entrance of the stone passage.

The fright and despair of Lodelli were now increased to the utmost excess: rapidly as she had pursued the frantic speed of Cecilia, she had not been able to overtake her in time to prevent her fall; and, to add to the distress of this affectionate being, the lamp which her lady had carried was extinguished by the accident. In this moment of dread, however, selfish alarm could not overcome poor Lodelli's sensibility of Cecilia's situation, and while with eager and trembling incertitude she essayed to reach the spot where the latter now lay lifeless, the arched roofs resounded with her unavailing cries for help, till she found the insensible form of the lovely girl, and raising her drooping head from

the cold pavement, supported her in her arms, and with simple, heart-felt lamentations essayed to recal her to animation.

For some time, however, the artless efforts of Lodelli were unsuccessful, and even when at length the feeble sighs of Cecilia gave evidence of returning sensibility, and her languid eyes opened on the surrounding darkness, she nearly relapsed on the discovery of her situation: her recollection almost maddened as the exclamations, tears, and expressions of Lodelli, proved to her the dreadful reality of the horrible object she had so recently encountered. Yet ere she had time to give utterance to the contending emotions which her mind at the moment experienced, or to regret the consequences of her sudden swoon, a small door, on the right hand of the passage, was suddenly but cautiously opened, and the figure of a man, bearing a lamp in his hand, advanced slowly from beneath the arched doorway; but on perceiving the still reclining form of Cecilia, yet on the supporting arm of Lodelli, but a few paces from him, he paused, and as he raised the lamp to survey more accurately the objects of his surprise, the rays of light that illuminated his own features discovered to the anxious, fearful gaze of the amazed Cecilia the but too well remembered countenance of Orazio di Udina.

The half-uttered shriek which now trembled on the lips of the beauteous girl,

as involuntarily she extended towards him her fair hands, and the exclamations uttered by Lodelli, who, in a tone of eager joy, pronounced his name, caused him to spring forward, and as with wild and penetrating glances he bent over the lovely figure of Cecilia, in almost breathless accents he demanded how long she had been an inhabitant of the castle.

Incapable from deep emotion and astonishment to instantly reply to his enquiries, Cecilia's looks alone spoke all the misery which her enforced residence in the castle had occasioned her to suffer ; and as she feebly essayed to rise from the pavement, he hastily resigned the lamp to Lodelli, and, with all that tenderness and delicacy which unfeigned and virtuous love inspires, gently raised her fragile form, and timidly entreated her to accept from him that support which her trembling attendant seemed unable to afford her.

Superior to the affectation of declining his assistance at such a moment, Cecilia moved a few paces forward, while in broken, tremulous accents, she informed him she had been above three weeks confined in the castle.

No exclamation of surprise was uttered by Orazio on receiving this information, but with increased eagerness he pronounced,

"And you are here detained contrary to the inclination of your mind, signora?"

The distant sound of the shutting of a door, and the murmur of voices, prevented

Cecilia's reply, and caused both herself and Lodelli equal dismay and apprehension, while Orazio, after a momentary pause, softly added,

"Be not thus alarmed, but suffer me to instantly conduct you to your apartment, near which you may suffer me to watch during the remaining hours till day-light. On the ensuing night I trust I shall be so fortunate as to possess the power of removing you whither you may command my attendance: but at this moment——"

And as he spoke, he gently hurried her along the vaulted passage.

The evidently but ill disguised trepidation of his voice and manner, even more forcibly urged the speed of Cecilia than his words; and while in silent amazement and alarm she suffered him to guide her onward towards the tower steps at the extremity of the passage, she observed that he used the utmost caution to prevent the echo of his swift footsteps as they vibrated on the pavement.

On reaching the foot of the stone steps, he merely whispered an enquiry whether they were in the right way to her apartment; and on receiving an affirmative reply from Cecilia, assisted her to ascend to the door of the tower chamber adjoining her room, where they paused once more, Orazio respectfully hesitating to accompany the lovely object of his care into the room, lest her delicacy should be alarmed by an act which she might deem presum-

ingly intrusive; while the timid Cecilia, although beyond measure anxious to learn to what cause she might attribute his singular and most unexpected appearance in the castle, was still so much agitated, that she had no power to make any present enquiries on the subject. Their mutual embarrassment was, however, speedily terminated by Lodelli, who, after a momentary silence, said,

"Pray, signora mio, as this young signor has been so kind as to offer to guard us all the night, would it not be better for him to stay in the tower chamber than on this ugly, dark landing-place?"

"You are then wholly unaccommodated in the castle, signor?" Cecilia now ventured to say.

"Not wholly so, signora," he replied; "but as my being here is entirely unknown to every person residing in the castle, except yourself and your attendant, I am compelled to act with all the caution which the occasion of my exploring in secret some parts of this massy fabric requires me to observe. This chamber," he added, "communicates, I am to understand, with your apartment; will the amiable Cecilia then, allowing for the exigency which urges me to hazard the request, suffer me to enter this deserted room, and, granting a few moments attention to the explanation of my motives for being here, deign to listen to those offers of service, with which she may possibly honour him whose life should be

most joyfully devoted to her ease or security by accepting?"

Cecilia did not reply, but she entered the room, and Orazio, receiving her silence as an acquiescence in his wish, followed.

Lodelli now placed the lamp in a niche in the wall, and endeavoured to secure the door on the inside; and while she continued her unavailing efforts to move a crooked rusty bolt, Orazio briefly informed Cecilia, that having learnt, on the return of the servants deputed to escort her to the convent near Verona, the alarming circumstance of her having been so mysteriously forced from their protection, he was at first inclined to attribute the fact to Angelo Guicciardini, but was soon undeceived in this conjecture by a providential accident, which discovered to him the real author of the deceptive transactions; and the removal of Leonardo di Rovenza, who on the day following her departure had set off on a pretended excursion to Nice for the recovery of his health, so well confirmed the account, that he had no hesitation in believing it, especially as the person who exposed to him the affair likewise informed him that she had been conveyed to the Castle di Forcello, amid the dreary mountains of the Cadorino.

Cecilia now for the first time discovered what she had before suspected, namely, that she was a prisoner in the isolated castle mentioned to her by the Signora della Albina, as having once been the place of

residence of Signora di Aretino, the mother of the Marchese di Rovenza. With increasing interest she listened to the little detail of Orazio as he proceeded to acquaint her that he was no sooner in possession of the secret of her concealment in the castle of Torcello, than, instantly conceiving all the danger of her situation, he directly resolved to hazard an attempt of extricating her from her perilous abode. "Fortunately," he added, "every circumstance appeared combined to advance and favour my design. A letter from the Count Ferbonino had, on the day preceding that on which I received the alarming intelligence of your real situation, informed me that my own affairs would not require my presence in Venice for nearly a month; and I availed myself of the liberty, with which this circumstance furnished me, to obtain the requisite permission of absence from my regiment, and informing the marchese that urgent concerns obliged me to make a speedy journey into a remote part of the country, I abruptly quitted the villa. My journey hither would have been performed without difficulty, had not an accident, which occurred to me in one of the wildest parts of these mountains, unavoidably delayed me."

With anxious, eager haste, Cecilia enquired the nature of that accident, and Orazio reluctantly informed her that he had been confined at the hut of a goatherd for some days by a fall from his

horse. Then with more consideration for her feelings than sincerity, he assured her he was quite recovered from the injury he had sustained, and continued his little explanation.—" On my arrival in the vicinity of the castle, I sought, as I had before premeditated, some secret entrance into this vast fabric, for I imagined that to require an admission at the gate would be unavailing. By the assistance of a poor peasant in the valley I discovered one through the vaults."

" Alas! then you are here clandestinely?" sighed Cecilia. " To what danger may you not be exposed! It is my hapless destiny to involve in trouble all who feel a generous concern for me."

The softness of her voice,—the look of meek sorrow which, occasioned by painful recollections and present uneasiness, gave added interest to her lovely features, seemed to deprive Orazio of that command over his feelings which he had, during the conversation, attempted to preserve, and in a tone of impassioned tenderness he softly articulated,

" You deign then to compassionate the sufferings which you must be sensible I endure in the necessity of submitting to a misfortune, which proved a source of anguish to me only as it deprived me of the power of flying to your assistance with all the impatient alacrity which my heart dictated.—Oh! Cecilia! turn not thus away:—add not to the misery I experience,

in not possessing the power of instantly releasing you from your present danger, by that averted glance of timid incredulity—of cold repulsive inattention. Once having avowed the indelible affection that my heart must cherish even to life's latest hour, ah! can'st thou think that I can behold her whom my soul idolizes with love's tenderest, truest devotion, exposed to all the evils to which unequalled beauty, unprotected youth and innocence, are subject, and cease to urge her to bestow on me the sacred, legal right of shielding her from all those horrors which unlicensed and mysterious power can inflict?"

"Forbear, forbear, signor," tremblingly interrupted Cecilia; "it is not just, it is not generous, to thus renew a subject which our mutual duties enjoin us to avoid repeating. How grateful—how truly grateful my heart feels for all that lively interest you evince for my fate, heaven alone can witness; but I can never cease to remember that the Count di Udina and the daughter of Angelo Guicciardini can never be united."

Her emotion was now so extreme, that her faltering voice refused to articulate the sentiments that reason and prudence dictated, and she turned away to conceal from her lover the involuntary tears that trembled in her down-cast eyes. At this moment a faint noise, seemingly proceeding from near the door that led into her own apartment, drew her alarmed attention to the

spot, and with inexpressible dismay she caught a view of the outline of a human figure, appearing for a moment beneath the door-way, and which as quickly vanished.

Consternation and terror at this most unexpected sight suspended the exclamation which her surprise might otherwise have caused her to utter, and even a moment elapsed ere she was sensible that Orazio was now at her feet, and pleading, with all the broken, timid tenderness of unfeigned affection, his claims to her regard.

But when awakened by the sound of his voice to a full sense of the peril of his and her own situation, she faintly exclaimed:—

"Oh, begone!—you will be discovered—attacked—perhaps inhumanly murdered! and——"

Orazio started up in amazement; his wild and piercing glance rapidly surveyed the room, while Cecilia, pointing to the door which led into her chamber, feebly added,

"Some person is in my chamber!—fly then, or you are undone!" and almost fainting, she reclined her head on the projecting stone-work of the window, while he hastily raised the lamp, and rushed towards the door of her room.

The apprehensions for his life which had now seized the mind of Cecilia gave her strength to follow his steps; but on reaching the interior of her apartment, her senses

had again nearly failed on her discovering, in the mysterious intruder who had so much alarmed her, the Marchese di Rovenza.

Amazed and motionless, the lovers stood gazing on the gaunt form of Rovenza, who, with a look placid yet severe, returned their astonished glances, while, in mild and serious accents, he said:—

"Misguided, erring children, if I am not too late to preserve ye both from inevitable destruction and infamy, learn on the brink of what a fatal precipice you totter, and hear, that in seeking to seduce Cecilia di Berlotti, Orazio di Udina would destroy his sister."

The fleeting spirits of Cecilia now indeed forsook her, and, with a deep and heavy sigh, she sunk senseless into the arms of her faithful Lodelli; while Orazio, wholly overwhelmed with the shock, which the abrupt discovery of his consanguinity to the lovely girl had given him, gazed upon her pale features with looks of wild and fixed despair, nor heeded the entreaties of the marchese, who would have withdrawn him from the room, and left Cecilia to the care of her attendant; but when her beaming eyes once more re-opened, and, with an expression of mingled grief and affection, were directed towards himself, the young man, no longer capable of enduring the enanguished feelings of his mind in her presence, uttered a groan of mental agony, and fled from the room, hastily followed by the marchese.

In this moment of amazement and horror, all the faculties of Cecilia became torpid from her former violence of feeling. The events of the last few hours appeared, to her overcharged mind, the chimeras of a wild imagination, and in a state little short of madness she remained till the morning.

CHAP. XIII.

MEANWHILE the Marchese held a lonely and interesting conversation with Orazio, whom he had prevailed upon to accompany him to the apartment he occupied; and when he perceived the deep agitation of the young man calmed in some degree by his earnest desire of receiving some explanation of his relationship to Cecilia, he entered into such details as, notwithstanding their brevity, fully proved to Orazio the veracity of the fact; he then referred him for a more circumstantial account to a future opportunity.

To describe the contending feelings with which Orazio listened to these accounts would be in vain, for they were such as one who loved with all the tender force of virtuous affection, and who found that every soft, impassioned sentiment must yield to the placid serenity of filial regard, could alone experience. It was true, he thought, Cecilia was now entitled to claim his best protecting care; but his soul sunk in

sickly sadness at the certainty that he dare no longer reflect on her beloved image with all the transporting emotions which cherished affection imparts to a mind of sensibility.

Silent, dejected, recoiling at the tenacity with which fond fancy pictured to his vivid imagination every charm of that adored object he must henceforward view in so dissimilar a light from that in which he had hitherto beheld her, Orazio scarcely heard the marchese as he continued to say:—

"The singular circumstance of Cecilia being torn from the protection of the attendants appointed to conduct her to the convent near Verona; my son's hasty departure, and the evident mystery with which you quitted the villa, together with my discovering that you had held some secret conferences with one of my household, combined to give me some suspicions of the state of the affair; and on questioning this man, I had but small difficulty in making him confess that Leonardo had caused Cecilia to be conveyed hither, and that you had followed in the hope of delivering the lady from her confinement and her lover. You may judge how much I dreaded an encounter between my son and yourself; yet the idea that Cecilia was related to you never entered my imagination till yesterday evening, when, on arriving here, I made the discovery—a discovery most fortunate for all parties, as

it presents an opportunity of removing every obstacle to the union of our families; for as you will now, I trust, determine to accept the hand of Ottavania, you will not be displeased when I inform you, that should Cecilia's claim to the name and rank of Udina be as fully proved as I am led to expect it may be, I shall most earnestly wish her to bestow her hand on Leonardo."

This was too much for the wounded mind of Orazio to endure with patience. He started, and paced the saloon with all those frantic gesticulations which evince a heart torn with the keenest emotions.

The marchese paused, and gravely awaited the moment of abating mental agony, ere he proceeded to acquaint him that it was his intention to return to his Venetian villa in a few days, adding, that he should now once more place Cecilia under the protection of his lady till the wished for period when she might become one of his family shold arrive.

This proposal was too just not to meet the approbation of Orazio; but after briefly acknowledging his sense of the marchese's proffered kindness, he could not so far repress the perturbation of his mind as not to say:—

"The conduct of the Signor Leonardo, respecting my—my—sister, is not yet explained, and——"

"His intentions, notwithstanding the violence of his actions, were strictly honor-

able," hastily interrupted the marchese; "for this, I believe, Cecilia herself can vouch, as my son assures me that he has not presumed to offend her delicacy with professions of affection merely."

Orazio once more traversed the room.

The marchese took no notice of his uneasiness, but said—

"As you will doubtless remain here while we stay, you had better suffer an apartment to be prepared for your accommodation, and retire to take the repose which I fear you but too much need. I will not enquire how you entered the castle; suffice it, that you may perceive that you could not have long remained here undiscovered. Do you chuse some refreshment? Ursulina, who never reposes on the few nights which I at different periods pass at this castle, can immediately prepare any thing you may command."

This coolness—this indifference, which to the tortured mind of Orazio appeared like the most insulting mockery or unfeeling stupidity, and not like the cautious gravity and placidity which the marchese thought proper to preserve on the present occasion, was ill calculated to calm the agitation under which he laboured, and while with a degree of angry vexation, unusual to his nature, he rejected the idea of refreshments, he begged that he might immediately be shewn to some chamber where he could endeavour to forget the miseries of his destiny.

The marchese now touched the bell, and in a few minutes Ursulina made her appearance with a tray of refreshments.

"You had better partake of the slight repast which I had ordered for myself, Orazio," said the marchese, addressing him.

But the young man heard him not, for his dark eyes were irresistibly rivetted, in abstracted attention, on the meagre features of Ursulina, who, as with trembling hands she set down the tray, involuntarily pronounced,

"Oh, Madre Dio! how much he resembles the count his father!"

"You knew my father?" faltered Orazio.

"Ursulina remembers him well," answered the marchese. "This is the person to whom I am indebted for my knowledge of the secret of your sister's birth; and, as it is on the evidence of this person that her right to the name of Udina depends, you had better learn from her lips a correct recapitulation of the facts I have already related to you."

Orazio too well knew that his already but too much disordered mind was not in a state that would allow him to pay the requisite collected attention to the detail, begged to postpone the recital, and requested to be shewn to the apartment offered him.

The marchese instantly ordered Ursulina to conduct him to a chamber which he

named, and then filling two goblets of wine, presented one to Orazio, saying at the same time—

"Let us drink to the memory of the virtuous and unfortunate departed—to the memory of Costanza di Udina."

Thus compelled by the veneration, filial love, and grief, with which the name of his father ever inspired the bosom of Orazio, he swallowed the sparkling draught, and then hastened to the apartment allotted to his use, where he passed several hours in a state of mental anguish, such as his imagination never had suggested as possible to endure.

CHAP. XIV.

As early as the marchese would permit himself to disturb Cecilia after the occurrences of the night, he sent to request her attendance in the gloomy parlor where she had before met Leonardo; and as soon as she made her appearance, he addressed her with a parental kindness in his looks and manner, and unembarrassed good-nature, which, notwithstanding the natural defects of his awkward demeanour, considerably revived her spirits, and enabled her to sustain, with somewhat of calmness, the conversation into which he entered, and which was intended to prepare her to meet both Orazio and Leonardo, without evinc-

ing by her behaviour to the latter that she indulged such a degree of displeasure at his conduct, as might induce her brother also to display a resentment that should prevent any friendship being formed between himself and the young Rovenza.

To the heart of the innocent Cecilia that brother was infinitely too dear to allow her to hesitate in promising to endeavour to consider Leonardo with complacent forgiveness; that chaste and timid affection, never indulged in opposition to the dictates of reason, which she had imbibed for Orazio, was of a nature so pure and artless as to be easily she hoped converted into that sacred relative regard which, ever divested of all selfish feelings, renders an amiable virtuous family so much resembling a society of angelic beings, and presents to the contemplation of a pious sensible mind, a scene of felicity so holy and so interesting.

As the marchese soon perceived that Cecilia was capable of listening to him with all that meek attention and calmness of manner, which indicated rationally subdued feeling, he proceeded to inform her that he had learnt from Ursulina the secret of her birth.

The acquired composure of Cecilia now yielded to the strong emotions of anxiety which this information excited in her mind, and although she shuddered at the idea of seeing Ursulina, whose late altered conduct had impressed her with the most unfavourable opinion of her principles, yet she

earnestly requested to see the old woman immediately, and to be permitted to receive from her own lips an explanation of the mystery hitherto attached to her supposed mother's story.

The marchese instantly assented to her wish, and Dame Ursulina was accordingly summoned to attend her commands.

The moment she entered, the marchese directed her to conduct Cecilia to an adjoining apartment, and there give her the requested recital.

The old woman immediately led the way to the next saloon, and while she paused at the door as Cecilia entered, her features assumed an expression of sullen asperity; and which, mingled with the usual formality of her look, rendered her whole countenance equally repulsive and disagreeable.

Cecilia's heart recoiled in involuntary disgust and dislike, as she desired Ursulina to sit down, and commence a brief detail of all the circumstances with which she was acquainted relating to her family. The old woman took a distant chair, and, in a morose tone, said,

"I believe it is not necessary for me, Signora, to tell you any thing but what relates to your birth, and therefore 'tis no use for me to begin a long account of the Udina family, with whose misfortunes you are no doubt pretty well acquainted: however, I must inform you that I lived as principal attendant to the Countess di Mi-

randini, at the time when the Count Costanza and his Lady Veronica came to seek some sort of an asylum with my lord and lady at Florence.—It was at that time I saw the count your father.—He was as handsome a nobleman as ever trod the earth.—But this is not to the purpose.—The Count and Countess di Udina were obliged to hide from their enemies in an old fortress belonging to *my* lord, and there they stayed for some years.—In the mean time I remained with my lady, as usual, and was as happy as the day was long, for there was nothing but greatness and gaiety to be seen in the pallazos and villas of the Count di Mirandini: all was going on thus merrily and contentedly, when my lord and lady were under the necessity of making a journey to Venice; and as soon as their business there was settled, they went to reside for awhile near Padua.—But this, you may have already heard, Signora; however, the villa they resided in was but a gloomy sort of place, and I was half out of my wits with vexation, when we were all thrown into a bustle by the unexpected arrival of the Count and Countess di Udina, who had very foolishly left the old fortress in the Appennines, only to come and meet their ruin and death in Venice. What happened at this time I dare say you already know, Signora, so there is no necessity for me to repeat it."

The unfeeling old woman paused here. Cecilia, in a voice scarcely audible, ac-

knowledged that she had already been informed of the dreadful catastrophe that followed.

"Well then," resumed Ursulina, "you doubtless know that after the arrest of the Count Costanza, the flight of *my* lord, the Count di Mirandini, with the young son of his friend, and the removal of the Lady Veronica to the villa of the Marchese di Rovenza, that the Countess di Mirandini suddenly and privately set off with the infant daughter of the unfortunate Udinas."—

"With all this I am acquainted," said Cecilia, in tones of breathless trepidation, perceiving that the old woman again wished for this assurance.

"But you are not informed of what became of the Countess di Mirandini and her young charge afterwards, I believe, and so I shall proceed to let you know.—In the first place, the reason why the countess ran off so abruptly, without letting the Marchese di Rovenza know her intention, was caused by her receiving a letter from her husband, commanding her to hasten to him with all possible speed to a particular place that he appointed on the confines of Switzerland, but, in order to elude the vigilance of his enemies, he directed her to take a circuitous route by the Milanese, and, as her course would thus appear to be directly contrary to her real destination, he hoped they should meet in safety. My lady literally obeyed the di-

rections of the count, but in crossing the Secchia, in the Milanese, to go round by Parma, into the Milanese, we were all near being drowned, and lost every article of value, in consequence of the carelessness and stupidity of one of the servants, who, however, lost his life by the accident, for we never heard of him more. Good fortune was at last inclined to make amends for all the trouble we had suffered, for we were saved from death by the Count de Weilburgh."

"The Count de Weilburgh!" exclaimed Cecilia, starting in wild amazement from her chair.

"Yes, young lady, the Count de Weilburgh—he was a relation of my lady's, and, by her father's wish, would have been her husband, if she had not liked the Count di Mirandini so much better. But pray don't interrupt me in this manner, Signora, or I shall never have done with my dismal tale. As I was telling you, the Count de Weilburgh saved us all from being drowned, and carried us to a neat little villa in a wood, not far from the river's side, and here we were made as happy and comfortable as we could be under such circumstances. But it did not turn out very well in the end, for this same count, who was a very handsome man, was deeply in love with my lady, and now he had got her into his power, he resolved to keep her there. So he quickly repaired a strong wall that enclosed the villa and the gar-

dens, and here detained my lady and I, with the infant daughter of the Count di Udina and her nurse. If my lady hadn't been so very unhappy about this business, and had not persisted in denying the suit of her lover, we might have been merry enough here, for the Count de Weilburgh's valet and the gardener were both of them good looking, laughing—"

"Proceed with your relation briefly, I entreat," now articulated the shocked and disgusted Cecilia. Ursulina, with a malevolent sneer, and in growling accents, replied, "If your over-refined delicacy is so much hurt by a little jesting, how will you bear to hear the rest? But you shall have it all true enough, I promise you, though I'll take care to be as brief as possible now. so, without any round-about explanations, I will tell you that the Countess di Mirandini had *a daughter* before she was suffered to quit the house of the Count de Weilburgh."

This cruel insinuation against the honour of the countess produced all the effect Ursulina wished, for the poor Cecilia, now pale and trembling, drooped her head in an agony of grief and sympathising shame.

The old woman laughed spitefully, and continued.

"There now, you see I told you truth: if a harmless joke could displease you, how could you expect not to be quite overcome with what would follow. But, that you may not think quite so bad of the countess

as to imagine she lived very long, or very happily with the Count de Weilburgh, I must inform you, that after three year's confinement in this villa, she contrived to escape with me and the two children, while the count was absent on a journey You— for I suppose, Signora, that you have already guessed that the young Udina, of which she took care, was no other than yourself, you were then about four years old, and her own daughter about three: your proper nurse was the contriver of the whole plan for our escape, and by extraordinary good-luck, we really did find ourselves at liberty once more.

" The change was not a very pleasant one, however, for, after a long and dangerous journey, we arrived at an old convent of Benedictine nuns, hid up among some of the most dreary points of the Appennines that cross the southward of Modena.

" In this gloomy, frightful convent, we staid four long years, when all of a sudden my lady declared her intention of removing. I can remember the pleasure that news gave me, even at this distance of time, and you may be sure I lost no time in putting on my best smiles; but, as if I never was to be merry again, what should happen, but just three days before we were to leave the convent, your nurse Laurina fell desperately sick, and died the next day. The countess was grieved to the heart, but I tried to comfort her, and promised to take the best care of yourself and

the little Cecilia di Mirandina, and so we at last set off on our journey, under the guidance of a person appointed by the Abbess of Santa Benedicta: but instead of being on our travels to some fine pallazo, or cheerful airy villa, where did I find myself at the end of our long course over mountains, rivers, and plains, but in the cottage in which you were so long resident, on the banks of the Lago Maggiore, in the Milanese, and close on the confines of the great dismal mountains of Switzerland." Ursulina again paused, as if the recollection of the vexatious feelings she had at that period suffered were not in a moment to be overcome, while Cecilia, who from the commencement of the narrative had fully comprehended that the Countess di Mirandini was no other than the Signora di Berlotti, could now scarcely repress the tremulous exclamations and enquiries that hovered on her lips; yet disliking to give the old woman another opportunity of insolently reprehending her for interrupting her recital, she continued silently attentive, and Ursulina again proceeded.

"The banks of the lake are, to be sure, gay enough at the time of the vintage, but then what is that to be compared to the life and pleasure to be seen when crowds of elegant cavaliers and noble ladies are assembled in the grand halls and saloons of a fine pallazo, or in the beautiful temples and porticoes of a summer residence amid tall and shady groves, where there is so much

well-bred mirth, music, and good eating. No, no, no, there's nothing like all that to be found in a poor, melancholy cottage, where the moon is the only pleasing light to be seen, as it sometimes peeps through the thick vine branches, or glitters in the lake, and where the shepherd's pipe is the only music to be heard, or the chaunt of an old mendicant pilgrim the only ditty, and where the table is as frugal as the fortunes of its owner are scanty. Such a life did not suit me, I'll promise you, signora; and although my lady did allow me some indulgences, yet I will honestly say that I soon became quite heart-sick, and longed from my soul for the gay, happy days that I was afraid I should never see again. The man who was sent with us from the convent of Santa Benedicta, indeed, still remained with us, and I must do poor Guispardo the justice to say that he certainly was a very well meaning, harmless old man, but then he was an old man, and was almost as sad and sorrowful in his looks as even my lady herself, who was so well contented in finding that she could keep herself hid up in the cottage, and take every opportunity of crying over her little daughter and yourself, that I believe she never would have found out how vexed and discontented I was, if I had not told her so myself; and so she now hired a little girl, that I might amuse myself sometimes by teaching her to mind the children, and to look over some of the domestic concerns.

And who do you think this pretty, little innocent maid was, signora?—no other than your pert, saucy Lodelli, who was then but a mere child, and who, before she had been two days in the cottage, almost plagued me to death with her stupidity. A little idle minx! she did nothing all the day long but play with the children, and taught them to make faces at me. I well remember her impertinence, and I should have tried to prevail upon my lady, who, by the bye, began to be vastly pleased with what she called her honest-hearted good-nature and simplicity, to dismiss her, if an accident had not happened at the time that put other thoughts into my head. There is a cavern close to the cottage, which I dare say you have often seen, signora; and it so happened at this time that a traveller was murdered at the mouth of it, about half a league from the cot; and his servant, who was half dead with a wound given him by the robbers, who first plundered and murdered his master, came to beg assistance at the cot. My lady was very charitable, and he was received and taken care of till he recovered; and—and—But to make short of my story: this man was so obliged to me for the care that I took of him, that he offered to marry me, and as he proved to my lady that he had been in the service of a great family in Tuscany, she consented. But now again my old luck interfered, for on the very night before I was to have been married, a frightful-looking robber broke

into the cottage, got into my lady's room, robbed her of all her few remaining valuable jewels, killed the infant in her arms, and made off with his booty.

"You may easily guess what a confusion took place after this. My lady was almost out of her senses with fright and grief; and I do really believe that had the robber killed you also, she would indeed have gone quite mad. However, she recovered—lamented her child—became doubly fond of you—vowed to the virgin to educate you as her own daughter, by whose name she called you from that day, and never to let you, as you was a poor, friendless orphan, know to the contrary: and I believe she faithfully kept her vow, and even Lodelli did not know the truth, for she was too young to be entrusted with the secret. Well, as soon as this business was over a little, my marriage began again to be thought of, and when that was over, I bid adieu to my lady, who made me as pretty a present as her poverty would allow her to do, and in return I gave her an oath of secrecy, and set off with my husband for Venice, where we both got into good situations. After a course of years my husband died; and as I began to be old, and no longer cared for gaiety, I came here to take care of the castle. 'Tis true 'tis a dismal place, but still it is a fine one; and as I can amuse myself with thinking of the feasts and carousals that once made it a mirthful one, why I have gone on tolera-

bly well, especially as my lord the marchese always allows me plenty of every thing that is good and comfortable: in return for which I make it a rule to obey his orders, or those of the young signor, with the utmost exactness, and without ever enquiring whether these orders are right or wrong; for it does not become me to doubt the discretion of those learned and well educated people, who certainly must know what is right better than those poor ignorant beings to whom Heaven, by entrusting them with power and riches, has given them for examples and guides, and who of course must naturally be answerable in a great degree for the crimes they command their dependents to commit.

"But as I don't like to preach any more, and as you, signora, are doubtless now satisfied on all points relating to your birth, I have no more to say, and may I suppose withdraw."

The old woman rose as she spoke; and although the agitated Cecilia was most earnestly desirous of making some further enquiries, yet the deep emotion under which she suffered rendered her so unable to support the vulgar consequence and insolent asperity of Ursulina's manner, that she made no attempt to detain her.

For some moments after the old woman retired Cecilia sat immovable, absorbed in the wonders of the recent discovery of her birth, till, as her busy thoughts reverted to the hapless destiny of her unfortunate pa-

rents, her heart was overwhelmed with emotions of the most poignant affliction; nor can language pourtray with what sensations she tremblingly recollected that the apartments she had occupied in the Villa di Rovenza had been the scene of her mother's last sufferings. A thrilling horror crept through her frame, and checked her tears, as she remembered that she had reposed on that very bed where the lamented Veronica had so mysteriously been murdered; and her senses had nearly fled when her imagination recurred to the terrific form she had beheld in the oratory, and on the preceding night in one of the galleries in the castle. Ere reviving animation allowed her to pursue in thought this dreadful and mysterious incident, the Marchese di Rovenza entered the saloon. Starting back as he beheld the death-like paleness of her countenance and almost lifeless attitude, he paused a moment, and observed her with a look of mingled enquiry and distress; and in this moment she recovered sufficient recollection not to mention to him the awful subject which wholly engrossed her mind.

Conscious that from him no explanation could be sought for of an event the slightest remembrance of which never failed to throw him into a state of delirium, Cecilia had sufficient presence of mind to make an effort to subdue her feelings; and Rovenza, now attributing her distressed appearance to the concern she must naturally have felt

in listening to the whole of Ursulina's narrative, gently reproached her for yielding so much to her feeling; and then added, "But I am come to express my hope that as you are now no doubt satisfied with Ursulina's relation, you will no longer suffer suspense and sorrow to afflict your mind, especially when I inform you that your amiable friend, the Countess di Mirandini, is safe in the convent where she passed some years prior to her settling on the banks of the Lago Maggiore. At no one moment of her life could Cecilia have derived so much consolation from this cheering intelligence as at the present: it gave a sudden and most beneficial turn to the mournful horror that had seized her heart, and awaked her mind to those emotions of sensibility and joy which caused the tears once more to rush from her eyes.

"Oh, gracious heaven!" she exclaimed, "to be restored to that dear and valued friend, is indeed, a recompense for all my sufferings;" and when her fast-flowing tears would allow her to proceed, she most eagerly requested the marchese to inform her of the particulars of that interesting event. He, however, excused himself from entering into an immediate explanation; alleging that his mind was still too much occupied by the recent discovery to converse on any other subject. He then spoke of Orazio—"Your brother," said he, "is indeed worthy of such a sister. Your destinies have doubtless been extraordinary,

and still there is much to explain. In a few days we shall set off on our return to the Villa di Rovenza, and in a short time afterwards you will behold the Countess di Mirandini, who can doubtless unveil those seeming mysteries which obscure some parts of the story. I allude to the conduct of the Count de Weilburgh and her evident ignorance that di Mirandini lived secluded in the Alpine solitude. Yet I believe I justly apprehend that both supposed each other dead. One point is, however, fully plain, I mean your real origin, and that is what most immediately concerns us at present. All else that appears to be enigmatical must be left to future explanation, when we shall have the happiness of being introduced to the Countess di Mirandini."

With much emotion Cecilia now begged the marchese to inform her in what manner he had been able to learn that the countess was in the convent of Santa Benedicta.

"A detail of my proceedings to obtain this intelligence would take up so much time at this important moment, that I must request you to permit me to defer the explanation," mildly replied the marchese, and then added, "Your brother and Leonardo wait in the saloon, and are undoubtedly impatient to see you: the one to testify to you how much he rejoices in having found such a sister, the other to express to you his contrition of his late erroneous conduct, and to receive from

your lips that assurance of forgiveness which I trust you will not withhold."

Perceiving the varying colour entirely fade on the cheek of the lovely girl, and that her downcast eyes were suffused with tears, while the trembling agitation of her frame now also betrayed the rising emotion of her heart, he gently took her hand, and in the kindest manner continued.

"Suppress, if possible, my dearest child, for such I will even already venture to call you—suppress, if possible, this extreme perturbation. Recollect, that Orazio, hitherto unconscious of your relationship to himself, has not yet viewed you with the eye of a brother, and should he observe any thing like weakness in your manner, the conquest of his own feelings may become extremely difficult—This is a subject to which I really did not wish to allude, but when I consider how requisite it is that you should evince to him your gratitude to heaven for the recent discovery, I cannot forbear recommending caution and fortitude."

The marchese could not have adopted a better mode of reasoning than the one he now so judiciously used, in order to induce Cecilia to attempt to assume that composure which was certainly necessary for her to appear endued with under the existing circumstances. The piety and delicacy of her mind caused her to experience no inconsiderable shock at the suggestions that Orazio might mistake the nature of

her emotion; and this very shock imparted to her the power of resisting the feelings of her mind.

With grateful timidity, she thanked the marchese for his considerate cautions, and, in a few minutes, acquired that look and air of placid dignity, which he wished her to wear in the approaching interview. Yet the internal trembling of her heart increased as he led her into the saloon, where, as he had prepared her to expect, she beheld both Orazio and Leonardo.

The agitation of Orazio, as he perceived her enter, was so excessive, that when he approached to meet her, he could not articulate a sentence; and all the affected calmness of Cecilia must have vanished at the sight of his disordered looks, had not Leonardo, with all the wild impetuosity of his nature, drawn her attention towards himself by falling at her feet, and imploring her pardon for the insult he had offered her, in having forced her from the protection of his father's servants, and confining her in the castle.

The moment he had commenced his almost rhapsodical petition for forgiveness, Orazio receded hastily to a distant window, and Cecilia, without daring to follow him with a single glance, articulated, as clearly as her emotion would permit, the requested assurance that she should no longer consider the conduct of the Signor Leonardo with resentment. Transported by the gentleness of her manner, the young

Rovenza uttered a thousand acknowledgments for this unexpected lenity, and on rising, led her to a chair, while the animation of his really handsome features, and the air of his person, betrayed the internal exultation of his heart in such striking colours, that Orazio, as his dark penetrating eye glanced over his figure, felt a sensation so agonizing pierce his soul, that he would have given worlds to have been able to fly from the contemplation of a degree of happiness which religion and virtue forbade him to envy or condemn. This keen emotion was soon, however, succeeded by feelings sad and despondent; and without daring to let his eyes rest even for an instant on the beauteous face and form of Cecilia, he listened, with apparent attention and real abstraction, to the marchese, as he said:—

"I have assembled you all, my dear children, not in order to enter into any further imperfect explanations, but in hopes of banishing all that embarrassment and constraint which the singular alternation of circumstances might produce if reflected too deeply upon in solitude. As to any arrangments for the future, I do not think them essential till our return to the villa, and would therefore recommend you to cultivate that mutual good-will and forbearance which I so ardently wish to observe established among such dear relatives of my family. For the present, however, we will separate till the hour of

dining reunites the party; and in that interval each may endeavour to acquire that composure and self-possession which will enable you to converse with ease on the recent occurrences.

The trembling Cecilia heard this intimation of retiring with unfeigned satisfaction, and slowly rising, silently bowed to Leonardo and Orazio, while the marchese once more offered her his hand, and led her from the room, and across the great hall to the foot of the principal staircase.

Ere she had ascended half way, she perceived Orazio coming out of the saloon, and with quick and hurried steps move towards a remote part of the hall beneath, and disappear in the shade of a cluster of pillars that concealed from her view a small portal opening into the outward court. In the next moment, Leonardo advanced across the hall towards the stairs, and she now proceeded with a degree of alacrity, which nothing but her apprehension of being overtaken by this wild young man could have imparted at that moment.

CHAP. XV.

Once more alone in her own apartment, and no longer under the necessity of fixing her whole attention on the suppression of those agitative emotions which every passing event was formed to excite in her

mind, she began to review her circumstances with a greater degree of calmness than she could have hoped to possess after the extreme agitation she had recently suffered. Conscious that the present was not a period for indulging in a harrowing retrospection of all the past events which no conjecture could explain, and that she now stood in need of the utmost self-command, she devoted her thoughts as much as possible to the consideration of the immediate circumstance in which she was engaged. The discovery of her relationship to Orazio was an event which called forth her most pious gratitude to heaven, and as the blush of timidly-remembered tenderness stole over her cheek, she aspirated a fervent thanksgiving to that beneficent power which had saved them both from the further indulgence of a sentiment which, but for the timely interposition of providence, might have been cherished to their destruction. She was now, however, at liberty to regard Orazio as a relative worthy her dearest regards; and the perfect purity of her heart left her nothing to condemn in the chaste and modest affection she had hitherto felt for him. From the indulgence of this subject, however, she soon turned her thoughts to the remembrance of their parents, and as with tears of filial regret she wept their fate, her heart was raised in mental aspirations for the eternal peace of the departed. The dreadful calamities those hapless parents had endured, in con-

sequence of their fatal deviation from the path of truth and duty; the awful involvement of the generous di Mirandinis in their misfortunes; the exile of the Count di Mirandini, doomed by faithful friendship to waste his life amid a wild and rude seclusion, yet still devoting himself to the memory of those for whom he had forfeited so much, and employing all his power in the succour and education of the son of that lamented friend who was so dear to his heart; the sufferings of the amiable countess, plunged in inevitable woe and ruin by the cruel passion of the Count de Weilburgh—every circumstance that had as yet been communicated to Cecilia, now, in these moments of solitary reflection, returned with increased interest to her mind; yet amid all the sympathising grief, the grateful love and reverence which filled her bosom, as she still wept the misfor tunes of parents unknown, and friends so dearly prized, one consolatory ray brightened the dark scene, and, with a beating heart, she mentally whispered to herself, "And am I not the daughter of Angelo Guicciardini!"—That terrific Angelo, the remembrance of whose kindness to the Count di Mirandini and her brother, could never wholly efface from her mind the fearful impression which her first knowledge of him had engraven on her heart; and as she now reflected on the circumstance, related to her by Lodelli, which implied some mysterious interviews between

the robber and the Signora di Berlotti, she could attribute their secret meetings only to that animated zeal and interest which Angelo took in the concerns of Orazio and the count his protector. That Guicciardini was also the friend of the signora, Cecilia could no longer doubt, and it seemed highly probable that he was acquainted with her real name and story: but so much was still enwrapped in mysterious obscurity, that the amiable girl turned away from the indulgence of conjectures which could only mislead, and looked forward with enlivened hope and expectation to the wished for hour when she should once more receive the maternally affectionate embrace of the protectress of her youth, and learn from her own lips the elucidation of all that now seemed to her comprehension so dark and entangled. Wisely seeking to banish from her mind all painful and unavailing retrospections of the past, and to animate her spirits by the contemplation of brighter scenes for the future, Cecilia passed nearly two hours alone; and if at intervals the idea of an unfortunate termination to her brother's intended appeal to the Venetian senate sometimes obtruded, she quickly regained hope and resignation by raising her eyes to that gracious power who is the guardian of the innocent, and to whose almighty fiat the proudest empires of the world must bend submissive.

Sustained and consoled by the lively

dependence on the protecting care of the Most High, so truly manifested to her by the recent events; the timely discovery of her relationship to Orazio, and her preservation from Leonardo's wild and cruel schemes, Cecilia now experienced so happy a contrast between her present feelings, and those tormenting cares and inquietudes which had harrassed her mind for some time past, that she yielded unresistingly to those pleasing suggestions by which hope pictured to her fancy the fulfilment of her dearest wishes, those of beholding her brother soon reconciled to that change which the recent discovery had made in their situations, and of viewing him elevated in the society which he was so well formed to grace, by all those titles and honours with which she could scarcely doubt he would be invested, when the justice of his cause was proved. Alas! poor Cecilia; the virtues of a pure and guileless heart are thine: the beautiful enthusiasm of confiding piety elevates thy soul above the fear of future cares and disappointment, while love, veiled by the soft and pure affection that defines not even the strength of its own feelings, flatters thee with the illusive hope of accomplishing impossibilities, and presents thy meek imagination with the promise of transforming all the tenderest ardours of that impassioned sentiment that still too brightly glows in the bosom of him whom thou must henceforth style thy

brother, into that mild and lambent ray which relative affection alone can know. With a mind thus feelingly occupied, Cecilia observed not the lengthened absence of Lodellli from her apartment, till the latter suddenly entered the room, exclaiming:—

"O, signora, I hope you are not displeased with me for not coming up sooner, but, in the first place, I thought you were still with the marchese and the young cavaliers in the great saloon, and in the next, I must assure you that I could not get away from that comical old Dame Ursulina, who, it seems, turns out to be no other than the cross attendant that lived with the signora, just when that dear lady took me from the poor hut of my father to your nice cottage. She has been telling me all about it, and asking me such a number of questions, that, what with my surprise and my not knowing that you were here, the time slipped by without my guessing how fast it flew; and now I can't repeat to you what I heard, because the dinner will be served in a few minutes, and you have still to dress."

The smile with which the amiable Cecilia received the simple apologies of her attendant was not that of reproof. Lodelli instantly perceived in the beamy radiance of her eye the happy change which had already taken place in the feelings of the beloved young lady, and while the faithful being now uttered the artless exultations of an honest heart rejoicing in

the alteration she beheld, she assisted Cecilia at her simple toilet with all the mirthful alacrity which had distinguished her manner in former times. Still, however, not all the surprise, hope and glee, that animated the usually joyous temper of Lodelli could make her forget the alarming object which both her lady and herself had seen in the distant gallery during their exploration of the towers on the preceding night, and, while with more than her common volubility, she informed Cecilia that comfortable preparations for the journey back to Venice were already begun, she could not refrain from saying, "But pray, signora mia, did the marchese tell you what that horrible thing was that frightened us both so much last night in the strange gallery?"

No question could have been more destructive to the sedulously attempted tranquillity of poor Cecilia than the awful one which Lodelli had now hazarded. The recollection of that appalling vision, and the circumstances which she believed to be connected with it, Cecilia had strenuously exerted herself to subdue. It was a dreadful mystery which she knew was now beyond her power to penetrate; and in order to acquire that appearance of composure which she believed it would be so essential for her to assume in consideration of her brother's peace, she had unceasingly endeavoured to withhold her thoughts from dwelling on that terrifically mysteri-

ous subject—a subject so much calculated to deprive her of all power of acting with propriety in the present crisis of her fate. It was now, however, recalled to her mind at the express moment when she wished not to think of it. A train of torturing, fearful, yet almost undefined suspicions now ensued, but from the indulgence of which she was, however, very fortunately drawn, by the appearance of Paulini to acquaint her that dinner was served.

In the large dining-hall, into which she was now conducted, she found, as she had expected, both Orazio and Leonardo present with the marchese, who now, with all that air of paternal goodness which had distinguished his manners towards her during their morning interview, hastily advanced, and leading her to the head of the table, placed her beside himself, and for some time continued to shew her every possible attention that could enable her to conceal the ill-disguised agitation of her own spirits, or prevent her observing the internal struggles of Orazio, whose mental torments were so exquisite, that, after many ineffectual efforts to partake the meal, he could no longer resist the overwhelming emotions of his heart, but, suddenly pleading extreme indisposition, abruptly rose, and rushed from the apartment, leaving the marchese and Leonardo in the utmost consternation, and Cecilia so heart-struck, so afflicted and amazed, at the idea of the severe disappointment which his conduct

indicated of all those guileless hopes which, within the few last hours, she had begun to cherish, that all her faculties now seemed benumbed, and many moments elapsed ere the marchese and Leonardo could reawaken her to consciousness and sensibility. At length the salutary relief which tears afford came to her aid, but with restored feeling came also the most poignant anguish of soul that she had ever yet experienced. The glance which darted from the expressive eyes of Orazio, as he quitted the room, had revealed to her all the wild tumults of his heart: it was the glance of distraction, of despairing love—and it was impressed on her mind by the quick emotions of astonishment, grief, and horror, that it instantaneously excited. In one moment she discovered how indelible, how ardent was his affection, and the conviction almost froze the life-blood in her bosom. When the fast-flowing tears rolled down her varying cheek, as revived sensibility rendered her perception of this misfortune more keenly severe, the lovely girl mentally reproached herself for every little recollected softness that she had suffered to steal into her former conduct to Orazio, and while the blush of self-reproving delicacy glowed through her tears, and her troubled heart beat with emotions of enanguished regrets and sorrow, she scarcely regarded the arguments which the marchese continued to use in order to lessen her grief; and, recoiling from the impas-

sioned entreaties of Leonardo, soon requested permission to retire to her chamber—a permission which the marchese immediately granted, although in opposition to the imploring looks and earnest wishes of his son.

CHAP. XVI.

When Cecilia returned to her melancholy apartment, she found Lodelli was again absent; and now in solitude resigning herself to all the excess of those contending feelings which agitated her heart, she threw herself on her couch and wept. For the first time she experienced that a full revolution of sentiments cannot be effected in a moment, and that the pure intentions of a virtuous heart may sometimes mislead the judgment of those who are unread in the pages of experience and observation. That tenderness which but an hour preceding she had imagined she might always cherish for a beloved brother, now appeared even criminal in her eyes; and in the extreme distress which this idea caused her, she believed that to devote her remaining days to religious retirement, would be her only resource against all the horrors to which the distractfng conviction of being the object of a brother's fatal passion must inevitably expose her.

"Ah, yes!" she softly breathed in accents quick yet faint, while her soul-illumined eyes were raised towards heaven; "devoted to thee, my omnipotent father; secluded while on earth from the eyes of him whom my trembling lips now fear to name, my prayers shall unceasingly be offered at the throne of grace; my sighs, my tears shall ascend in the morning orison, and midnight watching, till the hand of mercy draws from his tortured breast the arrow of guilty love, and closes with the healing balm of peace the wound which error gave."

The idea of retiring into a convent for life offered too much consolation to the afflicted mind of Cecilia for her to reject it even for a moment. It was the asylum to which her religion and her national opinions pointed as the most peaceful and secure retreat from temptation and error; and while with chastened sadness she still wept the involuntary and unconscious fault that rendered such a separation from her brother essential to his peace, her piety yet taught her to rejoice in the hope that when he should consider her as dead, his passion would subside into all those softened regrets which the remembrance of beloved departed friends inspires.

In this hour of sorrow, as in every former calamity of her days, Cecilia still experienced the calming influence of religious reflection, and in a short time the agitated feelings of her heart were succeeded

by that mournful, but meek disposition, which, while it feels the chastening rod of affliction, yet bends submissive to the blow, and heaves the sigh of pensive resignation. But notwithstanding the gentle patience of her temper inclined her to endurance, still the heart of Cecilia was more deeply affected than she herself was conscious of; till a sudden idea that the marchese might, in the event of the restoration of her brother's rights, resolve on obtaining her hand for Leonardo, awakened her to a full perception of her own feelings, and gave the dreaded conviction to her mind that she could never regard any other man with the same sentiments which she had felt for Orazio. This conviction, while it added to her grief, served to confirm her in her intention of taking the veil; nor did she doubt that her representations and entreaties would secure to her the concurrence and approbation of that valued friend, who, with even more than maternal kindness, had succoured her from infancy, and into whose affectionate bosom she now sighed to pour her sorrows. The anticipation of soon meeting the revered protectress of her youth diffused one gleam of comfort over her saddened prospects; yet it required all the aid which religious fortitude could impart to support her in those trials to which her destiny seemed daily to expose her.

Nearly two hours were now spent by Cecilia in all the mental grief and pertur-

bation which such a course of reflection must produce, when Lodelli once more made her appearance. The look of intelligence, the lively gesture with which she entered, were instantly converted into the gaze of dismay and distress on her beholding the lovely form of Cecilia languidly reclined on the couch, and the pallid tint of woe fixed on her tear-dewed cheek.

"O, signora! my dear signora!" she exclaimed, as, after the pause of a moment, she flew to the side of the couch, "what has happened to alter you in this terrible manner again? Here was I coming to tell you that we should surely set off for Venice on the day after to-morrow, and I thought you would be so happy."

Affected by the unfeigned uneasiness of her faithful servant, Cecilia now made an effort to appear less troubled, but her spirits were so much depressed, and her frame so weakened, that the attempt was unavailing, and she at length reluctantly desired Lodelli to leave her to silence and repose for a few hours; ordering her at the same time to inform the marchese that indisposition would probably prevent her leaving her room any more that day.

To leave her lady to solitude and the mournful influence of her own reflections, was, however, a command to which L[illegible] delli could not prevail upon herself t[illegible] mise obedience, and having soon [illegible] permission to remain near C[illegible] remainder of the evening.

bear her apologies to the marchese, who received the account of her indisposition with evident marks of concern and uneasiness, and instantly directed that Ursulina should provide such cordial medicines for her use as would most speedily procure her repose, and restore her to convalescence; nor did he omit repeated cautions to Lodelli to be careful in her present attendance on her lady.

Poor Lodelli certainly needed not these strict injunctions to fulfil that duty which formed the pleasure of her life; but she gladly availed herself of the orders she had received, as they furnished her with new arguments to induce Cecilia to take the requisite restoratives, which soon produced the pleasing effect of throwing her into a profound sleep, from which she did not awake till the following dawn. But, alas! it seemed as if the foresight of the marchese, in being thus attentive to her ease, had merely been exerted to give her strength to bear the shock which she received soon after breakfast, in the intelligence that Orazio had quitted the castle the preceding night, without giving the marchese the least intimation of his design.

The distracting concern which this information gave to Cecilia was not ameliorated by Lodelli's presenting her a billet, found in the apartment of Orazio when ‑ardo's valet went to inform him that ‑ waited breakfast. This almost un‑ ‑illet was evidently penned by

a hand rendered nerveless with excessive agitation, and its contents were of a nature to plunge Cecilia into new afflictions. They were as follow :—

" Cecilia—my sister ! Ah ! can I write that beloved name, and add to it an appellation which should be so sacred to my heart, but which strikes my soul with the most agonizing pangs of despair and indelible misery !.... Yet, is this a language to hold to thee ?—thee, whose purity will shudder at my dreadful state, and whose piety will pronounce me for ever lost and reprobated of heaven. Cecilia, I am distracted !—I would gladly expire in thy sight, but I fly to spare thee the horror and anguish of witnessing my torments---my mad despair——"

The hand writing was here so much effaced, apparently by the tears of the writer, that the trembling terror-struck Cecilia could not decypher several of the lines. A mist obscured her horror-fixed eyes as at length she continued--

" Yet, if heaven in mercy grants me strength of mind to endure this dreadful stroke, I will behold thee no more till, as the wife of another, I may contemplate thy angelic form without—— And yet can Cecilia be united to another ?—can she become the wife of Leonardo di Rovenza ? Impossible ! Fool !—wretch ! wherefore should it not be so, for what but that could crush thy impious passion, and save thee from destruction !—Oh, yes, Cecilia ! ador-

ed—My sister!—my sister! save me from myself, and——"

This wild epistle was unfinished, but sufficient had already met the enhorrored gaze of Cecilia: the letter remained convulsively grasped in her hand, yet she fell senseless on the floor ere her eye traced the last almost frenzied appeal.

Several days of severe illness, attended with frequent deliriums, succeeded this unexpected and frightful incident, and when Cecilia once more arose from the couch of sickness, she appeared but the pale shadow of her former self, yet so interestingly lovely was her perfect form; so beautifully expressive those features on which was now depicted all the meek and silent woe that filled the bosom of the uncomplaining sufferer, that on the first day of her re-appearance in the saloon, Leonardo beheld her with even increased tenderness and passion, while the marchese endeavoured to console her grief by every kindness which could evince the concern her situation gave him.

He soon, however, requested Leonardo to withdraw, and when alone with Cecilia, rather abruptly commenced a conversation relative to the letter which Orazio had left, and which was now in his possession; Lodelli having thought it right to present it to him for his perusal, as the cause of her lady's illness and distraction.

After expatiating at some length on the unfortunate circumstance of such an at-

tachment having been formed by a young man possessed of a temper so ardent as was that of Orazio, he alluded to the wish the latter had so wildly expressed for her to become the wife of Leonardo, and then in more direct terms, enquired whether she was determined to reject or follow an advice so earnestly, so anxiously given; but without allowing her time to reply, he proceeded to inform her that such an union was one of his own most serious wishes.

"Of the identity of your birth," he added, "I do not entertain a single doubt; nor have I the least hesitation in pronouncing my belief that both Orazio and yourself will be shortly put in possession of all those honours and estates forfeited by the supposed crimes of the count, your father. I will, therefore, be as ingenuous with you as I have already been with your brother; and honestly assure you that, although I would not commit an act of injustice in endeavouring to annul your claims, yet I cannot with unconcern behold so much property pass away from my family, nor be satisfied without making an attempt to preserve it to my children by alliances, which must render the interest of all parties equal; of course I now repeat to you, my dear Cecilia, my conviction that your consenting to bestow your hand on my son, can be the only means of reconciling us all; of making yourself happy, and of preserving your unhappy brother from the direful

temptation to which he is exposed while you remain single. Indeed, I think that your own innate delicacy and propriety cannot fail to point out to you the necessity of yielding to what you must doubtless perceive is his own wish, for although Orazio is not at present able to conquer the unfortunate passion with which he is so fatally inspired, he yet possesses good principles; and as he would avoid if possible the danger to which he is exposed, I flatter myself that the purity and innocence of your mind will not allow you to hesitate even for a moment, on so serious—so fearful a subject."

The deep emotion with which Cecilia heard this speech was exquisitly keen, yet she listened in the most attentive silence to the arguments it contained; and when the Marchese ceased to speak, she instantly replied—

"Let the Marchese di Rovenza direct my will as he shall think proper.—Grateful for the humane, the pious motive which dictates his arguments, I dare not attempt to controvert them."

"You resolve then to become the bride of my son?" exclaimed Rovenza, in a tone of animated surprise and pleasure.

"If you, my lord, deign to receive me as such under my present circumstances, I must certainly not decline the honour of—"

The voice of the pale and trembling Cecilia failed ere she could conclude her reply, but the marchese was so perfectly

pleased with her half-uttered assent, that he forbore to urge her to a fuller explanation, and taking her cold hand in his, with the same air of paternal pity and gentleness that had, since his arrival at the castle, distinguished his manner towards her, said—

"I understand you, my amiable child, and will spare you all further concessions. You are still ill: I will not therefore suffer the timid delicacy of your nature to be agitated even by witnessing the transports which my son must feel when I shall assure him that his long idolized Cecilia is indeed the reward of all his love and constancy. Retire to your apartments, and endeavour to recompose your spirits ere you receive the grateful homage of him whose heart you have already reclaimed from vice, and who, animated to virtue by your bright example, must henceforth prove an ornament to his country and his religion."

This eulogium reached not the heart of Cecilia: absorbed in the anguish of her own feelings, she scarcely heard the lavish praises the marchese uttered: but, mournfully bowing her head, quitted the room, and proceeded towards her own chamber, which, however, she could not have possessed strength or power to reach, had not she been met in the great hall by poor Lodelli, by whom she was assisted to her chamber. This faithful servant now, as usual, availing herself of the privilege which the

indulgence of Cecilia, and her own well proved attachment, gave her, ventured to enquire whether any new trouble had assailed her dear signora; but Cecilia was not in a frame of mind sufficiently composed to speak even to her on the subject of her union with Leonardo, and therefore dismissed her immediately to give some trifling orders to Ursulina.

Thus free to the indulgence of her sorrows, she wept anew, and while deeply lamenting the sad secret of her heart, implored of the Most High fortitude and patience to sustain her through the approaching trials to which she felt she soon should be exposed. No emotion of regret, however, was mingled with her sighs; for reason assured her that in promising to be the wife of Leonardo, she had merely fulfilled that duty which both religion and virtue commanded.

When a sensible and pure mind is convinced that it acts consistently with the dictates of just principles, it cannot long be subjected to the influence of violent feelings: the consoling voice of repentance and an approving conscience, whispers peace to the breaking heart, and lulls the passions to repose.

A very short period of reflection perfectly reconciled Cecilia to the step she had taken. It was obviously the wish of her hapless brother that she should marry Leonardo, and her own good sense told her that her becoming his wife must of course

be more conducive to the recovery of Orazio's peace of mind, than her retiring into a convent for life; an alternative which, were she to pursue it, might but too probably suggest to the ardent mind of Orazio that her affection for himself, and the disappointment of every hope of being united to him, had driven her to that state of austere solitude, where she could alone bury her griefs from the world. To deceive him into the opinion that she was really attached to Leonardo was therefore far better calculated to ensure his repose, she imagined, than to suffer him to suppose that she had been so truly a partaker in those tender sentiments which they had so fatally imbibed for each other, and against which it had now become so important a duty for both to struggle.

The temper of Cecilia, though ever keenly susceptible of the first impulses of her feelings, was yet, in general, mild and firm; and as from the earliest dawn of childhood she had been habituated to consider the performance of the most painful duties far less severe than the consciousness of their omission, she never shrunk from the task which virtue enjoined. To consent to become the wife of Leonardo was, with Cecilia, to resolve upon the fulfilment of what was due to the man to whom she was to be so sacredly related.

The defects of his character must now no longer be viewed by her with that severe investigation which might foment dis-

like and disunion between herself and him: to his person and manners the most fastidious could scarcely form an objection; yet to the filial reverence, the manly tenderness, which had latterly marked his conduct to his amiable maternal parent, she was solely indebted for the rather favourable sentiment with which Cecilia had regarded him, prior to the discovery of his having been the contriver of her enforced visit to the castle of Torcello. This was, however, a point on which she must now learn to think with indulgence, nor could she, on a rational retrospection of her circumstances, fail to consider her alliance with the family di Rovenza as an occurrence equally beneficial to her unhappy brother and herself.

Thus did this amiable girl endeavour to teach her heart to submit to her just judgment, and at length once more reasoned her mind into a degree of composure and resignation to the decrees of heaven.

Above an hour had glided away unperceived by Cecilia, ere Lodelli returned to the apartment. As soon, however, as she re-appeared, she excused her long absence by informing her lady that she had been obliged to attend the command of the marchese, who had been talking to her nearly the whole time.

Cecilia heard this information with unfeigned surprise, and immediately asked the subject of the marchese's conversation with her attendant.

"Why, signora," replied Lodelli, care-

fully examining the countenance of Cecilia, "I think I may venture to tell you *now*, for you don't seem half so ill and unhappy as you did a little while ago. But if it should disturb or vex you——"

There was something in the half-frightened, half-wishful look of Lodelli, that really led Cecilia to suppose that some fresh cause of uneasiness and alarm had occurred: but although she dreaded hearing what she observed Lodelli was rather inclined to communicate, she commanded her to speak unreservedly, alleging that suspense and conjecture would be more painful to endure than the knowledge of misfortune.

"As to misfortune, signora," answered the young woman,—"there is no great misfortune in being married to a fine handsome young cavalier like the Signor Leonardo, if you could but fancy him after—" Lodelli checked herself abruptly, and Cecilia, now understanding that she had heard of her intended union with Leonardo, and comprehending the occasion of her sudden pause, averted her eyes to conceal the emotion which the suppressed allusion to Orazio had excited in her bosom.

Lodelli, misconceiving the motive of Cecilia, turning away her eyes, shook her head, and continued—

"Ay, ay, signora, I thought how it would be, for all his excellenza is so sure and certain about the business. There's no getting over a first love they say; that is if it happens to be so true, and——"

Cecilia, agitated to excess, faintly articulated,

"You are in an error. I have promised to become the wife of the Signor Rovenza; my sentiments for whom should not be doubted after my having made such an engagement."

This slight evasion, which Cecilia found herself compelled to use, in order to repress the opinion which she perceived Lodelli entertained of her attachment to Orazio, produced the desired effect.

"Santa Virgine!" exclaimed the faithful being, while the deep glow of honest joy suffused her lively features; "and will you be the wife of the Signor Leonardo? and shall we all indeed return to Venice, to see all the fine sights, the music by moon-light, the doge, the noble Venetians, the maskers, and the sbirri!—shall we indeed?"

Mournful as was the heart of Cecilia, she could hardly forbear smiling at Lodelli's including the *sbirri* in her enumeration of the pleasures of Venice.

"Yes, Lodelli, if my being united to the Signor di Rovenza can assure you all this felicity, you will certainly obtain your wishes."

"Felicity!—Oh, Caro Donna!" again exclaimed Lodelli in accents of the wildest pleasure; "I vow, when all's happily over, I'll join the first pilgrimage to the Santa Catherina of Sienna, to return thanks for this joyful marriage. O, now I shall like

his excellenza for ever! Who would have thought that with all his strange awkward ways, odd down looks, and slow queer manner of speaking, that he could have ever persuaded you, signora, to this. But I always thought that the marchese didn't stop so often, almost before every word he speaks, for nothing; and now I see it is only that he may take time to think what is best to say, when he wants to make people do as he wishes, and——"

"What was the subject of your recent discourse with the Marchese di Rovenza, Lodelli?" now enquired Cecilia, interrupting the curious observations of her attendant.

"That is just what I was about to tell you, signora, only I was so glad to hear that you are really to be married to the Signor di Rovenza, that it all popped out of my mind. But as I was going to say, the marchese—no—that's not right. If I don't begin properly, I shall not know how to end. First then, signora, when you sent me to tell Ursulina to prepare the medicine you wanted, I ran as fast as I could to her room, and had only time to give her your orders, when the marchese bid Paulini desire me to come to him immediately in the cedar parlor; so I was obliged to go, lest he should be angry—you know, signora, that I never much liked the marchese, and was always afraid somehow whenever he spoke to me, for he always looks another way when he's speak-

ing to any body, and that gives such an odd cast to his eyes. This time, however, he looked at me strait enough, and was so good-tempered, that he would make me sit down when I came into the room. I was quite fluttered and ashamed; but he did not seem to mind that, and so, after a minute or two, he says, "Lodelli," says he, "you have lived with your young lady from your infancy, I believe." "Almost, signor illustrissimo," says I, "I am almost six years older than my signora." And then he asked me ever so many questions about how my Padrona and you, signora, usually passed your time at home, and who visited you, and if I recollected Ursulina, and remembered how my lady received the young Signor Orazio when he first came to the cottage; and at last, before I had time to answer two or three of his questions, he asked me, all in a hurry, how you came to let the Signor Orazio into your room the other night, and whether you did not appoint to meet him there? This quite vexed me, because I was sure that you did not know any thing about the signor's being here, till we met him in that ugly, dark passage; and so I told the marchese, ay, and said too, what a mercy it was for us to happen to meet with a good-looking human creature, after the horrid object that scared us so in that great, wide gallery. —But, O, signora, if you had but seen the marchese when I told him about that frightful ghost—I am sure it was a ghost, he

stared so, and turned so white; and then gave me such a sharp, odd sort of look, when he commanded me to describe the ghost; and when I told him how horribly ugly it was, he grinned at me, and walked off to the window.—Now, signora, by the marchese's smiling so, I should not wonder if that same ghost was nothing but a trick to frighten us? However, he did not ask me any more questions; but bid me go to my lady's room, and observe that you should want for nothing that could be procured for you either in or out of the castle; and——"

Here Lodelli was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of Ursulina, who came to say, that the marchese requested to see the Signora Cecilia in about a quarter of an hour, and would attend her in an apartment which she named, and which was rather remote from those occupied by the present inhabitants.

The agitated spirits of Cecilia were so much affected by the subject of the recent conversation of her attendant, that she had scarcely power to signify to Ursulina her readiness to attend the commands of the marchese, and when the old woman withdrew, she in vain sought to conquer the violent trepidation of her nerves, or regain composure for the approaching interview. She could not but consider this message as resulting from what had passed between Lodelli and Rovenza, and a gloomy sadness mingled with terror, stole over her

mind, as the moment of her attending the marchese drew near; and when she slowly descended the broad stone stairs, leading into the great hall, she felt herself so irresolute and enfeebled, that she was even more than inclined to return and send an apology for her non-appearance; yet as she hesitated and cast her eyes towards the rocky heights, now dimly seen through the high arched window of the hall, and faintly discerned the impending wild shrubs wildly fluttering over the varied-coloured sides of the cliffs, as the mournful breeze of a gloomy evening tore the light festoons, and foretold the gathering storm, she almost imputed the oppression that weighed so heavily on her heart to the influence of the sombre scene combining with her own sorrows, and at length perceiving Ursulina standing at the foot of the staircase, and in waiting to conduct her to the apartment where the marchese had appointed to meet her, she once more endeavoured to exert herself to obtain some degree of composure and resolution.

The effort was attended with success, and, with less emotion, she followed the old woman through a wide vaulted passage, that branched off on the right of the great hall, into one of smaller dimensions, and which seemed to run along that side of the edifice, in which the chamber usually occupied by herself was situated: at least, Cecilia imagined such to be the case, from the direction they were pursuing.

The termination of this long passage brought them into a small stone hall, on one side of which a pair of folding doors admitted them into a large antique parlour, not ill furnished, but by no means correspondent with the style of the apartments which Cecilia had hitherto seen in the castle.

"This room," said Ursulina, "ugly and dismal as it may seem, was, I have been told, quite the favorite sitting-room of the Signora di Aretino, his excellenza's noble mother.—She was a very religious lady, and bestowed all she could on the poor little convent of San Francisco, the broken spires of which may be seen by daylight, just peeping between the rugged stumps of those blighted pines that edge the top of that scared rock to the left—It's no use to look for them now, signora," continued Ursulina, addressing Cecilia, who had mechanically followed her to the window; "the darkness of the evening, and the dust on the glass, won't allow you to catch the least glimpse of them."

At this moment the marchese entered. The sound of his heavy footsteps caused Cecilia to turn, and Ursulina instantly withdrew.

"You are surprised that I have requested your presence in this remote and dreary room, I imagine," said the marchese, as he now led Cecilia to a sofa; and placed himself beside her.

"But the privacy with which a desire

to converse with you at present will explain my motive, and be my best excuse, for here only can we be free from the intrusion of Leonardo, whose impatience to throw himself at your feet, and to hear the confirmation of his happiness pronounced by your own lips, is so extreme, that I fear even my command could not induce him to wait a more proper opportunity of seeing you, were he informed that you have been able to leave your chamber this evening."

This excuse appeared so trifling to Cecilia, that she felt a considerable degree of surprise at finding that such was the marchese's motive for desiring so private an interview with her; she did not, however, make any reply; and after a slight pause the marchese continued. "Your servant has informed me that you experienced considerable terror,—I mean, sudden alarm, from some strange appearance which you both witnessed in one of the galleries, on the night of your meeting your brother in the castle.—If you can summon composure to describe the figure which so much astonished and terrified you, I should wish you to do so."

Cecilia, although not prepared for such a request, immediately obeyed, and, as distinctly as the tremulous agitation occasioned by her recollection of the alarming object would permit, described the appearance of the spectre.

When she ceased speaking, the mar-

chese sat silent for a few minutes, and then, as if suddenly starting from his short reverie, he exclaimed:—

"It is very extraordinary that you, who aver having had but a transient view of this supernatural being, can so exactly describe its every look. Your imagination must, in a great measure, have been imposed upon by your apprehensions and credulity;—or—or did you even at any other period encounter a similar object of fear?"

There was something so impressively penetrating in the tone in which the marchese made this enquiry, that Cecilia felt the sound of his voice chill her heart. She could not, indeed, discern his features, the gloom of the fast approaching night, rendering even the outline of his form barely discernable, yet the very obscurity, by which they were both surrounded, added to the involuntary awe with which she was at this moment inspired, and while she hesitated to reply, he fiercely bent forward, and wildly grasping her hand, again demanded, in a voice of wild displeasure, whether she had ever before the night alluded to beheld the object she had seen in the gallery.

In this moment of dismay all recollection of the cautions given her on the subject by the Signora della Albina vanished from the mind of Cecilia, and, in scarcely audible accents, she articulated, that she had, indeed, first seen the spectre in the oratory

belonging to the apartments she had occupied in the Villa di Rovenza.

The marchese held her hand more forcibly as she spoke, yet he trembled violently. "Tell me, unfortunate as thou art," he gloomily muttered, "didst not thou then in that ghastly form recognize——" He paused, yet, by the increased violence of his grasp, seemed to expect an answer, and the almost lifeless Cecilia faintly ejaculated, "Whom?" "Whom! whom but that accursed being that——But, no,—no, 'tis impossible! for how should'st thou, whose guileless innocence, and timid, unsuspicious nature, ever conceive the miseries of a soul doomed to perdition?"

At this moment, a vivid flash of lightning threw the transient and gleaming blaze round the dreary chamber, and revealed the pallid, haggard features of Rovenza, convulsed with feelings, undefinable to the anguished and amazed soul of Cecilia, who almost sunk into insensibility as her horrored sight encountered his looks.

Whilst yet the rolling thunder echoed amid the surrounding cliffs, and vibrated through the hollow arches of the castle, the marchese spoke not; but when another glaring flash of the red angry lightning streamed through the pointed windows, and the next loud crash of the contending elements rocked the lofty turrets of the tower, he called aloud for lights, and was advancing towards the folding entrance doors, when they were suddenly thrown

open, and the tall warlike figure of Angelo Guicciardini, bearing in one hand a shining cimeter, and in the other a blazing torch, stood before him.

"Rovenza!" exclaimed the robber, starting back, and evincing by the fierce and eager glance of surprise which he threw on the marchese that the immediate rencontre was unexpected, while a piercing cry of mingled horror and amazement was the only reply of the latter, as retreating in an attitude of dismay he staggered to one of the sofas and fell.

In the next moment the room was half filled by a party of the banditti belonging to Angelo; and the fiery glare of nearly a dozen torches which they carried now gave a wild and strange illumination to the scene, and rendered the singular outline of the whole terrifically impressive.

For a moment the astonished, trembling Cecilia gazed around her, with those peculiar feelings which give an indelible and ever to be remembered impression of the objects that excite them. It was a scene she never forgot:—the peculiar formation and decorations of the room, the black vaulted roof, the deep arched niches in the dark fretted wainscot, the ponderous ancient furniture, the high painted windows, the still vivid colours of which were yet visible at intervals in the lightning's blaze, combined with the striking figures that now occupied the apartment to produce an effect which never could be erased from the memory.

Haughty and commanding was the air that distinguished the noble form of Angelo Guicciardini, as he paused, and marked with the glance of angry contempt, the fear-degraded posture of Rovenza, who, half fallen on the couch, hid his face with his trembling hands, and seemed to shrink in dread and horror from the gaze of the robber, and the nearer approach of the hardy band that half encircled him.

After a moment's observation on the marchese Angelo waved his glittering cimeter, in token of forbidding the farther advance of his men, and instantly, on the well-known signal, they drew back, and ranging near the door, awaited in silence the command of their chief; yet though in ordered silence they stood apart, and although attention and respect softened the harsh contour of each countenance, still sufficient of characteristic expression was discernable in the faces of the band, to mark them strongly as an outlawed horde, even while their prompt submission to their leader proved the force of that superior intellect to which the most daring minds must bend in passive submission.

A momentary smile—apparently the smile of contempt, struggling with violent internal emotion, slightly convulsed the features of Guicciardini, as he turned his dark yet effulgent eyes from the prostrate form of Rovenza, and glared towards that remote part of the room where the beautiful figure of Cecilia broke through the

misty obscurity like the shadowed semblance of an heavenly being, recoiling from the dark pandæmonium that surrounded her.

The look of Guicciardini, as his penetrating glance sought her out, was transient as the star-like meteor, that swift as thought darts through the moon-light heavens and is seen no more; but it was a look which beamed with that benign, yet keen expression, that once before she had beheld diffuse the intelligent light of a generous and feeling heart over his strongly marked features.

The agitating expectation with which Cecilia involuntarily gazed upon him, was heightened to excess, when in mellowed trembling accents he pronounced:—

"Cecilia, come forth!" and then in tones that resounded through the high vaulted roof, exclaimed aloud:—

"'Tis thy friend—'tis thy protector calls thee forth! Once more would Angelo Guicciardini save thee from treachery and ruin."

Cecilia advanced a few paces, and at the same instant the marchese feebly raised his head from the arm of the couch, and with a wild affrighted look directed his haggard eyes towards Angelo.

Another smile severe and pointed—a glance which betrayed undefined emotions, lingered on the countenance of Guicciardini, as he again turned to observe the action of Rovenza, and coldly said,

"Dost thou yet know me?"

"Know thee!" returned Rovenza, in a voice so hollow and broken that Cecilia could scarcely believe that it was the marchese who spoke: "Oh!—yes—too well I know thee, Angelo! If my life can appease thee, behold I lay it at thy feet; but spare my fame—my honor."

"Thy fame!—thy honor!" exclaimed Angelo, while his whole form seemed dilated with the rising feelings of his soul, and his dark penetrating eye emitted the fire of honest rage, as recoiling back he spurned the abject approach of the marchese.

"Where is thy fame?—where is thy honor? The fame of a coward!—the honor of a murderer! Shrink into the imbecile abjectness of thy grovelling nature, thou sly and most insidious assassin, for thou art known..... Honor!—Where are the honors that once shed the splendour on the proud and boasted name of Udina? Blasted and withered in their bloom by thy fell influence, detested hypocrite!—fallen to the dust, and trampled beneath the ever-destroying foot of ignominy!.... Yet, tremble thou perjured and accursed, for the hour approaches which shall proclaim thy crimes to an astonished and abhorring world; and should the name of Angelo Guicciardini be known to posterity, its obloquy will cease when the voices of age and youth shall record that the robber Angelo was the punisher of the execrable Arnolfo di Rovenza; and the restorer of

the ruined fame and fortunes of Udina!"

Pale, motionless, and as even thunder-struck, Rovenza once more sunk on the couch, while Angelo commanded some of his men to bear the now nearly fainting Cecilia from the apartment.

The order was instantly obeyed, and the resistless Cecilia was borne from the room by several of the banditti, while the last sounds of which her fast-fleeting senses were perceptible, were the renewed denunciations pronounced by Angelo to the miserable Rovenza.

CHAP. XVII.

On recovering from her swoon, Cecilia soon perceived that some of the banditti were swiftly conveying her through the subterraneous passages and vaults of the castle, and that the silence and caution with which they proceeded, seemed to indicate some apprehensions of discovery and defeat.

Plunged in new difficulties by the recent event, she knew not what to wish or what to hope, but as soon as she could articulate a word, she entreated to be released from the men who carried her, and promised to accompany them in silence provided she was set at liberty from their hold.

A ferociously uttered command to be still and quiet was the only reply to her entreaty.

Incapable of opposition, she was thus compelled to submission, and in a short time found herself beyond the walls of the castle.

The night was still, dark, and tempestuous, yet the violence of the storm had ceased; the thunder was heard only at a remote distance, and the gleaming lightning no longer played on the pointed summits of the rocks. The dusky glare of a single torch served to guide the footsteps of her guards down the precipitous and rugged descent of an entangled path-way that led into the dreary glen beneath the rocks on which the castle was erected, and in this hollow the mules belonging to the banditti were now stationed in waiting.

Cecilia, well understanding how vain either remonstrance or entreaty would prove with the men in whose power she was, silently suffered herself to be seated before one of them on a mule, and the whole cavalcade immediately proceeded with all the expedition that they could use, to ascend the mountains towards the north-west.

A general taciturnity was observed by the whole group for nearly an hour, when one of the party suddenly cried out—

"By San Pietro! the old castle is in flames!"

The heart of Cecilia involuntarily trembled at the appalling sound. Quickly she turned her eager eyes towards that part of the country which she had left behind, and instantly beheld the ascending flames flash-

ing through the distant openings of the rocks. The too probable fate of her poor Lodelli, of the marchese, and the other wretched inhabitants of the castle, now rushed on her mind, and while with convulsive anguish she accused Angelo Guicciardini as the author of the devastation she witnessed, she yet felt the resistless conviction that Rovenza must, indeed, have merited the avenging justice which Guicciardini had thus executed.

Her ideas were now, however, so much deranged and confused by the sudden change which had taken place in her circumstances, that she was utterly incapable of connected reflection, and, in a short time, was so extremely ill, that her guards found it necessary to halt before the morning dawned, and to prepare a temporary litter for her ease and accommodation. This was quickly constructed of strong and leafy branches, torn from the trees for the purpose; and thus in a state of alternate insensibility and delirium, the hapless Cecilia was conveyed for the remainder of the journey, which, however, terminated towards the close of the evening. For several days, the innocent sufferer was wholly unconscious of every thing which occurred to her; yet what were feelings, when once more her intellectual faculties were restored, to find herself sustained and supported in the arms of the maternal friend of her youth; and to hear the soothing accents of that voice, which she had ever obeyed with

all the revering alacrity of filial obedience, now speaking peace to her heart, and recalling her to life and hope. She started up, and wildly gazing on the features of the Signora di Berlotti, gave a shriek of rapture and fainted.

Transient, however, wa hser present insensibility, and in a few minutes she again awoke to all the happy reality of the scene. But the animation of her mind was too lively for her yet enfeebled frame to support, and her voice betrayed exhaustion ere she had pronounced but a few of those eager enquiries which the anxiety of her heart dictated.

The signora, instantly sensible of the danger of suffering her to weary her spirits at such a moment, now, with tender earnestness, commanded her to observe the silence essential to aid her recovery, and Cecilia, complying with the wishes of this beloved benefactress of her infancy, endeavoured to obey.

Still, however, she could not wholly restrain the half-uttered ejaculations of amazement and delight:—the grateful aspirations to heaven, for being restored to the protecting fondness of her earliest friend, till the latter was compelled reluctantly to hint that she must withdraw from the side of her couch, unless she resolved to compose herself to that rest which her state so much required.

"Ah, do not—do not leave me!" wildly sighed the lovely girl, and closely locking

the hand of the signora in her own, she hid her face on the pillow.

The curtain was now closed, the light placed at a greater distance, and the most profound silence observed. Still Cecilia slept not—she was scarcely heard to breathe, but her eyes were employed in surveying, through the half-closed curtains of the bed, the situation of the apartment in which she supposed she was, and she soon discovered what, in the first moments of restored perception, had not attracted her notice.—In fact, she now perceived that, instead of being in a chamber, as she had at first imagined, she was, in reality, in a small compartment of a cavern, the craggy inequalities of which projecting from the dark side nearest the bed, instantly revealed to her the truth.

This discovery struck her with some emotions of surprise, and she would have instantly ventured to question the signora on the subject, had not the sound of approaching footsteps, softly echoing along the rocky ground, checked the enquiry that hovered on her lips.

With a palpitating heart, she listened to hear who was advancing, when suddenly the well knowntone of Angelo Guicciardini struck on her attenive ear, as, in sonorous yet murmured accents, he said,

"Does she live, signora?"

"She does—she is even sensible," replied the signora, in the whispered tones tha spoke confidence and friendship toward

the enquirer," and then added, in a lower voice, " and she now sleeps."

An ejaculation, not distinctly heard by Cecilia, was uttered by Angelo.

After a pause, he said,

" The utmost secrecy and concealment will be necessary for a few days longer.—To-morrow possibly I shall set off; and you may commence your journey, if the health of Cecilia will permit her removal—your escort may be depended upon, for never yet have I had occasion to doubt their fidelity."

The agitated and half-suppressed respiration of the astonished Cecilia now betrayed that she did not slumber.

" Hark! she awakes!" exclaimed the signora, and Guicciardini instantly retreated.

As the vibration of his receding footsteps stole along the caverned walls, Cecilia started up, and, throwing back the curtain, anxiously gazed on the pale countenance of the signora, while in tremulous accents she pronounced,

" Ah! my more than mother! explain to me the meaning of what I have just heard:—what am I to believe? Am I the child of Udina, and is not Orazio my brother,—or must I indeed claim as a parent Angelo Guicciardini? Oh! tell me all, or I shall expire in these suspensive agonies that rack my soul."

" The child of Udina! The daughter of Angelo Guicciardini!" exclaimed the signora, wildly starting from her seat. " Again she raves!" And retreated, as if to summon some assistance.

The piercing entreaty of Cecilia recalled her to the side of the bed, "Oh!" continued the lovely girl, throwing aside the luxuriant and dishevelled tresses that shaded her face and form, and clasping the dark garment of the signora, who now once more stretched forth her arms to support her, "I am not mad; but my imagination is so confused and harrassed with the remembrance of such varied scenes of horror and distress, that surely my keen anxiety to learn what I really have to dread might offer some excuse for my precipitancy."

"Cecilia, my beloved child," returned the signora, as her tears fell fast on the still fevered cheek of the beautiful object of her cares, "let thy mother implore thee to refrain, from seeking those agitating explanations which thy present state renders thee so unfit uo hear.—Oh! distract me not with those appalling fears of losing thee, which thy refusal to devote a few hours to repose inspires."

"Oh, my mother!" again plaintively articulated Cecilia, "you fill my heart with the keenest emotions of sorrow and regret for my offence. Yet, ah! consider what I snffer, while uncertain of the fate of those who, next to thee, are so dear to me. Even my poor Lodelli, has she even escaped the destruction of the castle of Torcello?"

"She is safe, and has been conveyed to the convent to which we shall immediately proceed when you are able to travel.

Do not then, my child, retard the hour of security. Every mystery will soon be fully explained: think now only of thy health, and let the idea of imparting comfort to thy mother's heart endue thee with patience and submission."

The tone of heart-felt anxiety and dread in which the signora spoke, penetrated the soul of Cecilia, and while her faltering tongue again implored pardon for the impatient sorrow she had manifested, she once more sunk on her pillow, and resigned herself to the will of that dear parent whose commands she had ever so sacredly obeyed.

END OF VOL. III.

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